PRIVATE EYE

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28 Sept. –
11 Oct. 2007
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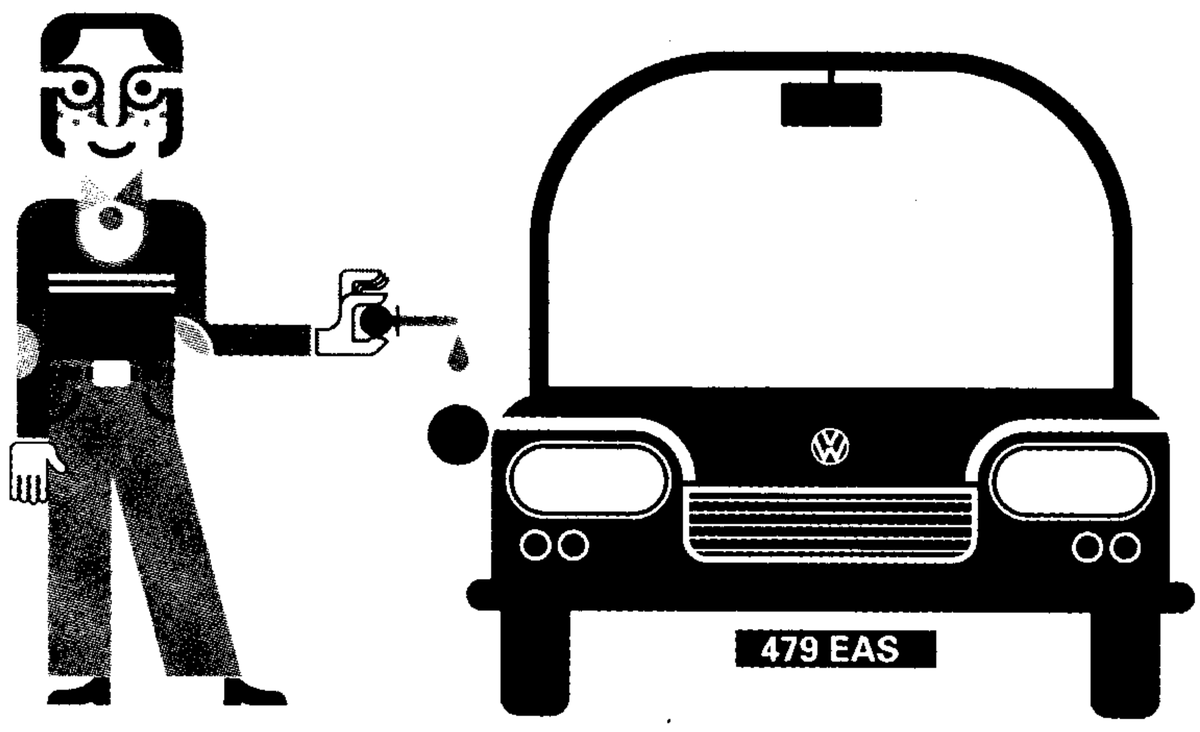
LABOUR HONEYMOON

INSIDE: BROWN TONGUE OUTBREAK – EVERYONE SAYS GORDON MARVELLOUS

With fuel prices being so high shouldn't we find ways of using as little as possible?



Being responsible sorts we developed petrol and diesel engines that make efficient use of fuel. We call them TSI and TDI, you call them neat.

Volkswagen Thinking

Official figures for the TDI models in the Volkswagen range in mpg (litres/100km): urban 16.0 (17.7) – 57.6 (4.9); extra urban 29.4 (9.6) – 88.3 (3.2); combined 22.4 (12.6) – 74.3 (3.8). CO_2 emissions 99 – 333g/km and for the TSI models in mpg (litres/100km): urban 27.7 (10.2) – 29.7 (9.5); extra urban 46.3 (6.1) – 50.4 (5.6); combined 37.7 (7.5) – 39.8 (7.1). CO_2 emissions 169 – 179g/km.

A Message From Northern Gnome

MAY I take this opportunity to assure savers and investors in Northern Gnome that my money is completely safe and that there is absolutely no need for me to panic.

There is no chance, I repeat no chance, of me losing a single penny of my considerable salary and bonus.

I hope that this firm statement will reassure my wife, Lady Gnome, who in recent days has taken to queuing outside my office seeking to withdraw large amounts of cash to spend on jewellery and other so-called "crisis proof financial accessories".

Let me reiterate to her and to others like her who may be concerned at this time that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has personally assured me that however abysmally I have run Northern Gnome he will guarantee huge sums of taxpayers money to enable me and my lady wife to live in a style to which we have long been accustomed. I thank you for your support and understanding.

Lord Gnome
Northern Crock
New Newcastle
The Cayman Islands.

We're Opeless

(surely "Open"? Ed)

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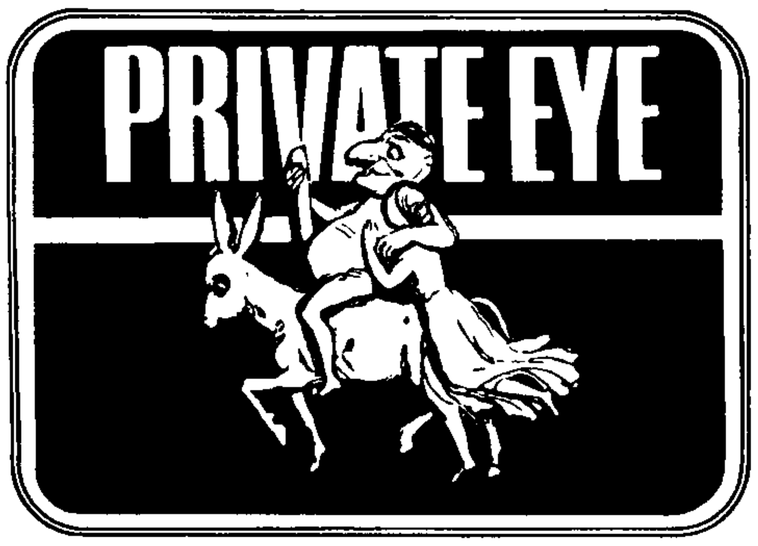

Bank on us

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SO MUCH for Gordon Brown's "new politics" and his decision to resurrect "citizens juries", which kicked off last week with a series of NHS discussion groups around the country.

Behind this supposed exercise in listening to the people was none other than Opinion Leader, a subsidiary of the Chime group of PR and marketing companies chaired by Tim (now Lord) Bell, Margaret Thatcher's former publicity guru.

Citing the Department of Health as one of its major clients, Opinion Leader claims to be the UK's number one opinion-leading research company specialising in "thought leadership" and "developing innovative, bespoke solutions for clients that help transform the status quo".

But is "thought leadership" the same as genuine consultation?

At each of the nine "Our Future" health events, all 120 guests were handpicked (but not for their expertise) and then lectured on the need for change. This was then followed by a DVD, quiz and round-table discussion. According to one invitee, "informed" VIP observers were invited to watch but not intervene.

With key-pad voting and high-tech electronic links between the nine groups, all of whom were holed up in comfortable hotels or conference centres, the consultations were a thoroughly "new" Labour way of engaging with "staff, patients and the public"... and then presumably ignoring them.

TWO months have passed since Cambridge University Press pulped a scholarly tome called *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World* – the latest of many books to disappear after legal threats from the Saudi billionaire Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz. The last *Eye* carried a long account of the case, as does the current issue of *Index on Censorship*. But no word of it has yet appeared in any national newspaper.

The silence is deafening. In America, as we reported in the last *Eye*, Mahfouz's use of British libel laws to stifle almost any author who dares mention him is becoming a *cause célèbre*. It's a cause which should appeal to both left and right in Fleet Street, since the many publications pulped at Mahfouz's behest in recent years range from Spartist to Neo-Con. And it should certainly appeal to editors, given the chilling effect of Mahfouz's antics on free speech. Where are those liberal champions at the *Observer* when you need them? Where the fearless libertarians of the *Spectator*?

Er, keeping their traps shut. Two weeks ago the *Observer* was set to run a column about Mahfouz by Nick Cohen, but then spiked it after a fit of legal collywobbles. Last Sunday Cohen alluded to him in a more general column about Saudi influence in Britain. By the time it appeared, however, the *Observer* lawyers had removed every mention of Mahfouz's name.

Earlier in the summer the *Spectator* lined up a long piece about the litigious Sheikh by Brendan O'Neill, which listed all the pulped titles and concluded that this Saudi billionaire is "almost single-handedly determining what we Brits may read and hear about contemporary terrorism". One thing Brits may not read, alas, is O'Neill's piece: it too was spiked at the last moment!

● *Free speech made Eady – Ratbiter, p10*

IN a surreal twist to Northern Rock's tale of financial hubris, at the eye of the ensuing financial storm – which saw the first run on a British bank for more than a century and put the government's economic credibility on the line – is a small charity dedicated to helping people with Down's Syndrome, the Down's Syndrome North East Association.

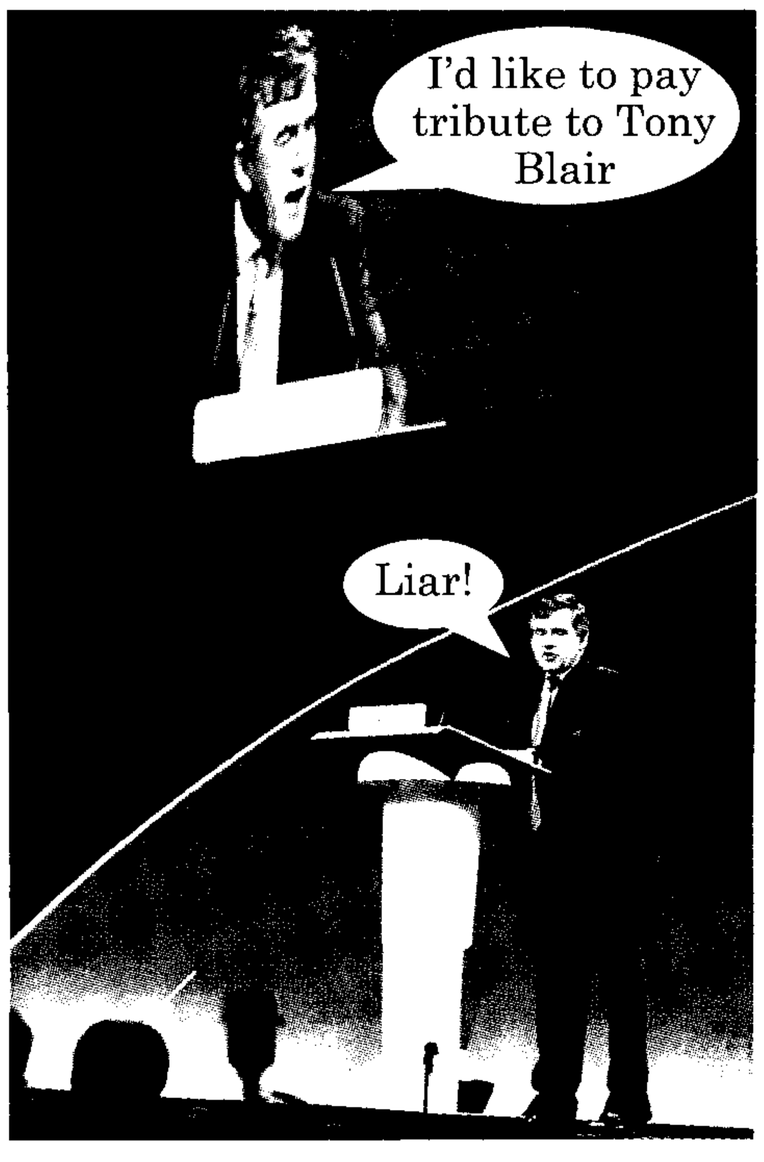
Northern Rock securitised its mortgages through an elaborate corporate structure involving a group of companies with variations on the name Granite Finance and Granite Master. But for the scheme to work, shares in the parent company, Granite Finance Holdings Ltd, couldn't be owned by Northern Rock itself. Instead they were placed in a Jersey trust which had to have a separate function. This became ensuring that any Granite profits "will be paid for the benefit of the Down's Syndrome North East Association (UK) and for other charitable purposes".

Despite the billions flowing through this arrangement in recent years, not a single penny has found its way into the Down's Syndrome charity. This, claimed Northern Rock, was because the arrangements had not yet been terminated. Yet the charity, the *Eye* has learnt, didn't even know they had started!

Although Down's Syndrome North East did receive a £40,000 donation from the bank and its staff in 2001, treasurer Adrienne Nicholas was gobsmacked to say the least when the *Eye* told her of her charity's role at the heart of a great financial crisis. As far as she knew, there was no further relationship.

Northern Rock's use of an unsuspecting local charity, without its consent, in a multi-billion pound international financing scheme shows just how contrived financial engineering has become. And while Down's Syndrome North East is at no risk from its unwitting involvement, perhaps Northern Rock's much-vaunted community spirit might see a small cheque on its way to the charity.

● *News, p4; Slicker, p29*



NEWS

WHAT drove Northern Rock to keep borrowing as much as it could on the short-term money markets and lend it out in mortgages as quickly as possible despite the risks this inevitably built up?

The answer is that, even by corporate Britain's short-term standards, Northern Rock's executives were crudely encouraged to maximise profits today no matter what the consequences tomorrow, encouraged by a fabulously generous bonus scheme.

The scheme was simple: 5 percent of basic salary for every 1 percent growth in profit before tax on the previous year up to a maximum bonus of 100 percent. How to maximise your bonus? Keep cranking up the machine regardless of the consequences. Sure enough, the directors squeezed just about everything they could out: all executives received 95 percent bonuses in 2006, chief executive Adam Applegarth's package hitting £1.36m. For 2007 the scheme was "simplified" further: 10 percent bonus for every 1 percent growth up to a maximum 200 percent bonus.

Responsibility for these arrangements lies largely at the door of the company's remuneration committee, which included former Nat West banker Sir Derek Wanless and was chaired by Nicola Pease. Her day job is chief executive of JO Hambro Capital Management, manager of several hedge funds – exactly what the dependable Northern Rock behaved like under the directors' money-grabbing pay deals.

DOES Chelsea chief executive Peter Kenyon need to brush up on his Russian so he can understand Roman Abramovich's bidding more clearly?

Last Tuesday every newspaper quoted Kenyon's reassuring remarks about José Mourinho as Chelsea prepared for a European tie against Rosenborg: "There's loads of speculation that if we don't win, José gets fired, but that's not the way we think." This seemed unambiguous enough for the *Times* to declare that Mourinho's position "is not under immediate threat". A day later he was sacked.

This sort of communication breakdown has plagued the Roman empire before. In March 2004 Kenyon gave an equally forthright defence of Mourinho's predecessor, Claudio Ranieri, on the eve of another European game: "This wave of unprecedented and continuous media speculation about Claudio's future and false links to other managers is unhelpful to our manager and the players in the build-up to an important match in the Champions League. We only wish to reiterate that Claudio Ranieri has over three years to run on his contract." Ranieri was duly given his P45 shortly afterwards.

Last week Andrei Shevchenko helpfully translated some tactical advice to his team-mate Michael Essien. Perhaps he should offer the same service to the wretched Kenyon.

Street Of Shame

"CAN'T speak English? Don't pay tax? Go to the front of the queue." Thus the headline on a typically thoughtful essay by *Sun* pundit Jon Gaunt.

"British jobs have already been given to foreigners," he complains, and "ruthless employers are deflating Brit wages by employing either illegals or cheap Eastern Europeans."

Are these non-English speaking immigrants by any chance related to the ones who have recently been flogging the *Sun* for 20p on every bridge in London?

WHEN the rest of Fleet Street caught up with the Bruce Hyman story (the *Eye* revealed how the barrister and showbiz producer was facing as long ago as issue 1192), the *Mail on Sunday* got particularly steamed up.

"It is a fall from grace of Shakespearean proportions," it declared in a double-page spread describing how Hyman had become the first lawyer ever to be jailed for perverting the course of justice.

As the *Mail* noted, Hyman is "a flamboyant 'player' with many influential friends" including Robbie Coltrane, Angus Deayton and Clive Anderson. But it omitted to add that a few years ago he had a professional partnership with one Harvey Kass. They co-produced several theatrical ventures in London, most notably a musical based on Dickens's *Mystery of Edwin Drood* – a box-office flop despite the inspired casting of Lulu and Ernie Wise in the main roles.

Where now is Harvey Kass, whom the *MoS* forgot to mention? He is legal director of Associated Newspapers, publishers of the *Mail on Sunday*!

MADDIEBALLS: THE PIECE THAT SAYS IT ALL

"MADELEINE McCANN: YOU ARE ALL GUILTY", shrieked the headline over an article by India Knight on the *Times* website.

"The public is to blame for the heartless abuse being heaped on Kate McCann," wrote Knight. "The internet has blurred the lines of news and hearsay and the result is trial by global gossip."

Indeed. Directly under the article's headline was written, "What do you think? Post your comments in the reader feedback section at the bottom of this article."

WHEN you have forked out £600,000 for exclusive stories of *Big Brother*'s losing lovers Chantelle and Ziggy, you have to look to make savings somewhere.

Canny *Daily Star* owner Richard "Dirty" Desmond gave this advice to his top execs in email form. He urged them to follow his money-saving example by treating their dear old mums to Sunday lunch at the local Harvester to take advantage of the 2 for 1 offer.

A mere week later, however, Dirty Des had apparently abandoned his penny-pinching ways: he bought a three-engined private jet to transport himself in style around the globe to his various financial honeypots.

With adverts for CarpetRight, owned by his pal Conservative peer Lord Harris of Peckham, once again adorning the front page of his titles, staff wonder if the jet in question is in need of some interior refurbishment.

"THE first person to say 'fuck' on television was Kenneth Tynan, in 1965 – everyone knows that," announced novelist and list-fan Nick Hornby in his introduction to the eighth in the *Guardian*'s much-trumpeted series of "Great interviews of the 20th century".

"Peregrine Worsthorne was the next to explete, in 1973… the winner of the bronze, Glen Matlock of the Sex Pistols, is as famous for his contribution ('We've fucking spent it, ain't we?') as Tynan himself."

He continued on this theme for some time ("Matlock is the first person without an Oxbridge degree to have used the word on television"...), before introducing a full transcript of the band's ITV interview with Bill Grundy – which undermined things somewhat by revealing that it was actually guitarist Steve Jones who let slip the tertiary expletive, while Matlock didn't swear at all.

"PREPARE for the return of the 1970s group who made the likes of Mick Jagger look like Cliff Richard," gushed the *Sunday Times* in October 2002, when Led Zeppelin were threatening to re-form.

The paper then re-heated apocryphal tales about the monsters of rock, including the one about a party guest who "emptied a bag of fish entrails over the girl, who was writhing about with Cole and Bonham, according to *Spin*, the American movie magazine. Then Bonham reportedly grabbed a shark and performed a 'sex act' on the woman. A counter version holds that it was a red snapper..."

Now fast forward to September 2007 and Jane Fryer's report in the *Daily Mail* that Led Zep really are to re-form. "They made even the likes of Mick Jagger and Keith Richards look like Cliff Richard," she opined, before telling *Mail* readers verbatim how a party guest once "tipped a bag of fish entrails all over the girl, who was writhing about with…" and so on. Uncanny!

THE *Guardian*'s financial team ran a full-page profile recently on the achievements of Kris Gopalakrishnan, chief executive of the Indian outsourcing company, Infosys.

It took his company 23 years to attain $1bn in revenues, the profile burbles happily, and just 23 months longer to hit $2bn, with further ambitions to offer "strategic consultancy services as well as behind-the-scenes IT work". Pressed for his view on the benefits of such lucrative globalisation, Mr Gopalakrishnan observes: "We can't say that it is the right thing or the wrong thing. It is just happening."

It is surely pure coincidence that Infosys has recently been doing strategic consultancy work for the *Guardian*. Naturally, we can't say that this is the right thing or the wrong thing, but we *can* confirm that it is happening.

THE ZZZ-LIST

An occasional column devoted to the least exciting items of celebrity gossip in the national press. Readers' contributions welcomed.

"SHE has been married to a pop star for 21 years but Yasmin Le Bon admits she's more partial to a bit of heavy rock – including the soon-to reunite Led Zeppelin – and that she also used to love listening to punk."

– Day & Night column, Daily Express, 14 September

MISTRESS of the mop Rachel Simhon, late of the *Daily Telegraph*, certainly knows how to clean up with her ramblings on dusting and descaling.

Having earned £350 a week for writing a column about washing and ironing in addition to her then £70k+ salary, the former *Telegraph Weekend* editor sold the columns as *The Housewife's Handbook* to Bloomsbury for £30,000. The book will be published on 1 October.

Alas, the new brooms at the *Telegraph* axed both the column and Simhon; and when she tried to sell her former employers the serial rights to a book they had already published, they politely declined.

Thankfully Simhon's new employer, the *Daily Mail*, has been more forthcoming and has paid her an extra £7,000 to run a series of old pieces that have already appeared in the pages of its archest rival.

"Make up some letters attacking the BBC"

THE DEATH OF BECKET

"BILLIE Piper says prostitution is 'hideous, abusive and destructive'. So why does she make it look so glamorous on TV?"

So asked the front cover of the *Guardian*'s G2 section on 20 September, referring to Piper's pisspoor new drama, *The Secret Diary of a Call Girl*.

Having expressed its disapproval, how better to illustrate it than by printing eight pictures of famous prostitutes from film and TV history, along with two full-page pictures of Piper posing seductively in costume and, er, making prostitution look glamorous on TV? Humbug, anyone?

JUST FANCY THAT!

THE *Independent*'s "Days Like These" column publishes correspondence and diary entries by the great and the good on their anniversary dates.

On 18 September 1940, so the *Indy* reported last week, the philosopher Friedrich Engels "writes to his sister Marie from Bremen: 'The gales are raging frightfully; in our house a window was blown in last night. Tomorrow there will be news of shipwrecks coming in!'"

Hard times indeed. Though Engels would have been glad to be writing at all, having died 45 years previously.

SEVERAL years ago Neville Dean, a young hack from the Press Association, got his first shift on the *Daily Telegraph* due to the kindness of veteran newsdesk administrator Kelly Scott, who booked him for a try-out despite the misgivings of the then news editor.

So successful was Dean's subsequent career that he went on to join the paper full-time, and earlier this month he was promoted to deputy news editor – following the latest round of redundancies at the paper.

One of those whose contracts was terminated – after 25 years at the paper – was the same Kelly Scott. Last week she held a joint leaving party with five other redundands, including the paper's royal and education correspondents and its political editor of two decades standing. Dean didn't turn up – but then neither did a single other executive from the new-look *Telegraph*.

RUMOURS that *Observer* editor Roger Alton was about to leave his job following a tense meeting with his *Guardian* counterpart Alan Rusbridger last week concerning proposed 7-day integration of the two titles and their website have been hotly denied.

Alton has told concerned hacks that he "couldn't be having more fun". And indeed he couldn't. He has just taken delivery of a shiny new company car.

HACKS at Wapping who log on to Facebook – usually in a desperate quest for diary items – now receive a message from their employer asking them to "minimise personal use to this site".

News International claims this is a temporary edict, "while we are taking steps to increase our internet capacity". And, of course, it's wholly unrelated to the fact that Facebook's arch-rival, MySpace, is owned by the Dirty Digger.

HACKWATCH:

Anatole Kaletsky

ANATOLE KALETSKY, the *Times* economic pundit, is a celebrated guru. Financiers pay handsomely for his keynote speeches at international seminars; awestruck politicians and bankers never miss his column. But, er, why? A glance through his prognostications reveals a talent that makes his colleague Mystic Mogg look positively oracular…

15 June 2006: Share prices have been plunging for days. "Yesterday afternoon, however, the gloom suddenly started lifting… maybe the worst was over; maybe the great bull market was ready to resume." Not so, Kaletsky warns. Any stock market recovery will be nothing more than a dead-cat bounce. The bull market is over.

10 July: Two weeks ago, Kaletsky recalls, he predicted that the new chairman of the Federal Reserve "would want to produce a very hawkish statement, suggesting strongly that the Fed would continue to tighten monetary policy in the months ahead… This was a nice theory, but it turned out to be wrong. The Fed chose to say exactly the opposite of what I had expected."

7 September: Back in December 2004, Kaletsky announced that "Mr **Blair** will be out of **office** before the **end** of next year". Now he gazes into his crystal ball again. "Last week I wrote in this column that Tony Blair would either announce an unequivocal date of departure before this month's Labour Party conference or he would be ousted by a ministerial coup before Christmas," he notes. "Well, the Prime Minister proved me wrong. On the very morning my article was published, Mr Blair arranged an interview with the *Times* to announce definitively that he would not reveal a timetable for his departure." Yet Kaletsky still insists he was right: "Mr Blair now really has no choice. He must and will name the date of his departure before the party conference." Alas! Blair doesn't actually name the date until May 2007.

18 September: "There can be no denying that global economic growth has continued to surprise," Kaletsky observes. Take the resilience of the British economy, "which I expected to be no stronger this year than last year and to require a boost from lower interest rates before it could start to accelerate in 2007. Instead, the British economy has proved so frisky that the Bank is now using higher interest rates to rein it in." And the same is true elsewhere. "Those of us who expected a global slowdown this year have to concede that we were wrong."

18 December: Every Christmas, Kaletsky reviews the predictions he published the previous January. "This year, even more than usual, reading back through January's predictions has been a shock. Almost all have turned out to be wrong." So what does the next year hold? He goes away for a fortnight to inspect the tea leaves.

1 January 2007: Kaletsky's new year message: "Optimism for 2007 is well-founded." Six months after announcing the end of the bull market, he now thinks "the bull markets in shares and property have every reason to continue".

23 April: Not so fast: Jeremiah has returned. "Underlying inflationary pressures are much stronger than the Bank of England and the markets expected," he warns. "To make matters worse, accelerating inflation makes sterling less attractive in the long term and raises the possibility that Gordon Brown and the Bank have 'totally lost the plot' in their efforts to manage the British economy."

21 May: *Mea culpa* time again. "I have to admit it: I was wrong about Europe. After a year of deflationary increases in taxes, interest rates and exchange rates, I had expected a severe slowdown in Europe by now… Worse still for my reputation as an economic pundit, there has been no sign of the plunge into near-recession that I had been predicting for Germany… In fact, Germany was, despite the tax increases, again the strongest economy among the eurozone's big three." Why does he keep getting it wrong? "Maybe I am guilty of eurosceptic wishful thinking," he muses.

16 July: And still the *mea culpas* keep coming. "Europe this year has already been hit by a potentially lethal combination of fiscal and monetary deflation." Yet, as he admits, "this has not caused the major slowdown that I have been persistently predicting… Rather than trying to make excuses for my wrong predictions on Europe, let us suppose that my analysis was simply wrong." Right ho.

19 July: Although house prices may "stabilise or modestly decline in the year ahead", there's no cause for alarm. "A modest decline in house prices will do no serious damage to personal finances and wealth," he assures readers. "So enjoy your holiday, even if you are travelling on borrowed money: you are unlikely to face bankruptcy when you return."

6 September: "Did you happen to notice the collapse of global capitalism and the end of the world financial system as we know it? If not, don't worry. Like me, you must have been on holiday in August." Kaletsky feels sure that last month's financial crisis "will probably turn out to be another storm in a teacup".

14 September: Kaletsky congratulates Bank of England governor Mervyn King for refusing to bail out private lenders and borrowers who have got into a mess. "There is much to be said for this tough approach from both a political and economic standpoint. As Mr King argued in his letter, the world economy will become less efficient in the long run if governments provide 'ex post insurance to institutions that engage in risky or reckless lending'."

17 September: Watching the Northern Rock crisis, Kaletsky suddenly has "a queasy feeling of a kind I had not experienced for exactly 15 years – on Black Wednesday." Apocalypse is at hand, but "Britain's rulers [are] waiting calmly for the market to solve their problems, while the roar of a tidal wave seemed faintly audible from afar." And whose fault is it? "This detached approach was predictable after Mervyn King's high-principled statement on bank bailouts last Wednesday…" The same statement he praised so highly three days ago? Just so. The Bank and the government need to do a U-turn – but can't do so without shattering "Gordon Brown's reputation for financial competence [and] the Bank's hard-won credibility and independence". On the other hand, he admits, "by the time you read this article, every word of it may well have been reduced to irrelevant nonsense".

18 September: And so it proves. "A catastrophe has been averted," Kaletsky rejoices, following the U-turn. "The government has acted in time."

20 September: On 17 September Kaletsky said that official intervention in the Northern Rock crisis would wreck the reputations of Gordon Brown and Mervyn King. Now he says exactly the opposite: "You should disregard sensationalist headlines about collapsing consumer confidence, recriminations in Whitehall and heads rolling at the Bank of England. The reality is that all the most important actors in this drama have ended up with their positions solidified." If only one could say the same for Anatole Kaletsky. As the old Times advertising slogan used to ask: have you ever wished you were better informed?

- **New foot-and-mouth case confirmed**
- McCanns consider own tests on car

- **Manager Mourinho leaves Chelsea**
- 'No current plan' to question McCanns

BBC website

LABOUR CONFERENCE FRINGE BENEFITS

GORDON BROWN insisted that the unions lose some of their influence at this year's Labour party conference. But corporations were more than welcome in Bournemouth – provided they were happy to throw cash at a variety of meetings with ministers...

Eat my words

Coca-Cola paid for a meeting to be addressed by **Stephen Timms MP**, alongside Coke's own William Asiko, on "corporate social responsibility". More incredibly, on conference Monday the **Health Minister Dawn Primarolo** was due to talk about the obesity crisis in a meeting sponsored by **Nestlé**, whose contributions to fighting obesity include Kit Kats and "Cookie Crisp... the chocolatey chip cookie cereal that kids love".

Nestlé, lest we forget, opposed and ignored Labour's scheme for simple "traffic light" food health labels and attacked its plan to limit junk food ads for kids. The company has vending machines in schools and attracts children with cartoon character advertisements. Spokesman Rupert Maitland-Titterton was due to speak alongside busy Dawn, who was pencilled in on the same day to address a Fabian meeting on getting high street chemists to deliver NHS services. The sponsor? **Boots**.

Praying for forgiveness?

The Christian Socialist Movement was expected to be present as ever at conference, this year bringing together Christians "with a radical commitment to social justice" and some rather less radical ministers. On conference Tuesday, "enterprise minister" Timms (again) was down to play host to Mammon at a lunchtime meeting on the subject of "digital exclusion and the information gap... kindly sponsored by EDS".

The computer contractor certainly knows its subject: many poorer families were "digitally excluded" from their benefits thanks to an EDS multi-million-pound cock-up at the Child Support Agency, and it generated a massive "information gap" in botched work for the Inland Revenue. The Christian Socialists appear nothing daunted by this dismal record – nor by the fact that EDS is an arms contractor.

NHS plc

Health Minister Lord Darzi, who recently proposed getting high street shops such as Boots to deliver NHS services, was booked to address a Fabian meeting on "Beyond Hospitals? Transforming the NHS", paid for by dear old **BUPA**. The private health firm would love to get a slice of Darzi's health delivery action; BUPA boss Natalie-Jane MacDonald was also booked to speak.

Ann Keen, another health minister, was due to discuss the "NHS Core Offering" – which sponsor **Pfizer** hopes will mean more drug money. Richard Barker, head of the **Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries**, the lobby for drug firms, was due to join her. Barker is also booked to speak alongside **Lord Warner** thanks to another drug firm, **Merck Sharp & Dohme**. Lord Warner may have resigned his minister's post after overseeing the NHS national computing cock-up, but he is still influential in health policy as part-time chair of a new quango, **NHS London's Provider Development Agency**, which oversees the capital's hospitals. **Health Minister Ben Bradshaw** was expected to get even closer to big Pharma, addressing a Fabian meeting on health paid for by three medical companies: **GlaxoSmithKline**, Merck Sharp & Dohme (again) and **Wyeth**.

Nuclear family

On a final nuclear note, **Energy Minister Malcolm Wicks** was booked to take up the issue of "energy policy and climate change" on a Fabian platform paid for by **EDF Energy**. The French firm wants to build nuclear power stations in Britain and put up its boss, Paul Cuttill, to join Wicks on the platform.

CALLED TO ORDURE

GORDON Brown's Scottish Labour stooges on the Commons treasury select committee excelled themselves in beating up the governor of the Bank of England and his deputy. It is a long time since MPs have had quite so much fun insulting impartial regulators.

But then it is a long time since a prime minister has been quite so keen to avoid blame for a near collapse in our financial system. Bank governor Mervyn King and his deputy Sir John Gieve made convenient scapegoats for a regulatory model which MPs have known about for ages and which was set up by, er, Gordon Brown.

The select committee's chairman John McFall, an old ally of Broon, could barely wait for King and Gieve to account for themselves. He kept interrupting their testimony, snapping and tskking in his high-pitched brogue. King's patience was remarkable. Any normal being would have told McFall for God's sake to shut up and listen but central bankers are phlegmatic.

McFall shrieked at Gieve: "Frankly, I do not think you are doing your job." Former schoolmaster McFall was also outraged that Gieve should have taken a short holiday this summer instead of reading interim reports from Northern Rock. McFall himself was sporting a healthy sun tan, no doubt acquired during long hours of toil in his Dumbarton constituency office.

George Mudie, another long-standing Broonite, was vexed that Threadneedle Street had failed to prevent Northern Rock's liquidity crisis. "Well that's nice, that's very nice to know," he said sarcastically after listening to an explanation from King about the statutory obstacles. Mudie sits at a committee table like a middle-aged man driving an MG – leaning back, a look of smooth satisfaction on his face.

"You were content to watch this impending disaster, this train running towards the buffers," Mudie told the grandees from the Bank. McFall weighed in to tell Gieve it was "absurd" for him to come to the committee and say he was helpless. "You're the guy in charge of financial stability!"

But McFall and Mudie were perhaps forgetting about a hearing their committee conducted earlier this year, on the morning of Thursday 1 February, when they discussed the very same issue of "financial stability". At the time, of course, they had no idea that there could be a banking crisis. And at that time, with Gordon Brown still chancellor, they were not keen to hear criticisms of the complicated tripartite system of financial regulation devised by G. Brown.

The witnesses at that hearing included the same Sir John Gieve. When he started to explain the fiddly changes to the memorandum of understanding which limit the Bank's powers to interfere with troubled banks, McFall became impatient. He told him off for being "flippant". It is hard, on any analysis of the minutes of the meeting, to detect that Gieve was being anything but straightforward in his answers. McFall seems to have personal "issues" with Gieve.

Having explained to MPs that the Bank was no longer in sole control of stability mechanisms, Gieve said he was "concerned about a loss of functionality in the financial system which would damage the wider economy because it no longer functioned to bring savings and investment into balance or to transmit money effectively round the system". This, as it happens, is precisely what happened with Northern Rock. Its savings and investments fell badly out of balance and banks stopped lending to each other – or "transmitting money effectively round the system", as Gieve had put it.

McFall and Mudie were thus given a remarkably accurate warning about what could happen. If anyone is "not doing his job" it may be McFall and his fellow MPs.

Mind you, there is a good reason Mudie did not recall Gieve's prescient evidence. Only five MPs bothered to attend the 1 February hearing and Mudie was not among them. Perhaps he did not think "financial stability" such an important subject then. Or perhaps he had not been told to go along and put the boot in by Gordon Brown.

'Gavel Basher'

OLYMPIC HIGH JUMP

CHANNEL 4's *Dispatches* investigation into the great Olympic costs cover-up revealed that as long ago as September 2004, before London's low-ball bid was submitted to the International Olympic Committee, Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell and Gordon's Brown Treasury were told it was way short of what was needed.

But how did it get so low? A clue emerges from the official history of the bid, *The Race for the 2012 Olympics*, by its PR supremo Mike Lee (now cashing in as agent on future Olympic bidding jamborees).

In August 2002, a few months before Jowell went to parliament for approval for the bid, she had been advised not to bother. "A departmental report prepared by senior civil servants in the Department of Culture, Media and Sport warned her that it was not winnable and would cost too much money," Lee revealed. "But, enthused by the vision for the East End and the potential legacy for sport and for London, Jowell ignored the advice. Instead she spent the autumn re-analysing the costs and trying to persuade her cabinet colleagues in a series of crucial private meetings."

"Re-analysing the costs" duly produced ludicrously unachievable figures which, it was finally admitted earlier this year, would multiply three-fold.

The *Eye* asked for the August 2002 report under Freedom of Information laws. After several months, DCMS has refused to release it as doing so would not be "in the public interest". There's a surprise.

SNAP ELECTION – CAMERON IN TRAINING

"A NEW KIND OF POLITICS"

Tony Blair, 1997	Gordon Brown, 2007
Enters Downing Street outlining priorities as education, the NHS, and to "be a government that seeks to restore trust in politics in this country… That is our objective for the people of Britain. Today, enough of talking – it is time now to do."	Enters Downing Street outlining priorities as "change in our NHS, change in our schools, change to build trust in government… That is my promise to all the people of Britain, and now let the change begin."
Appoints former personal adviser Peter Mandelson as cabinet office minister to be his eyes and ears across government	Appoints former personal adviser Ed Miliband as cabinet office minister to be his eyes and ears across government
Appoints SDP founder Roy Jenkins to chair commission on electoral reform	Appoints SDP founder Shirley Williams as adviser on nuclear proliferation
Gives David Simon, chairman of BP, a peerage and makes him Minister of State in DTI	Gives Digby Jones, former head of CBI, a peerage and makes him Minister of State in DTI
Appoints former Conservative front-benchers Chris Patten and Michael Heseltine as chair of RUC inquiry and Millennium Commissioner respectively	Appoints former Conservative front-benchers Patrick Mercer and John Bercow as advisers on security and children with learning difficulties respectively
Holds hour-long meeting with Margaret Thatcher in Downing Street within three weeks of moving in	Holds hour-long meeting with Margaret Thatcher in Downing Street within three months of moving in
Dithers over whether to rule out referendum on Euro entry	Dithers over whether to rule out referendum on European treaty
Brown-noses Stuart Higgins, editor of Sun, in return for favourable coverage	Brown-noses Paul Dacre, editor of Mail, in return for favourable coverage
Lets it be known that he has been consulted by family at centre of enormous news story, death of Princess Diana	Lets it be known that he has been consulted by family at centre of enormous news story, disappearance of Madeleine McCann
Changes party conference procedures to end composite motions raised at last minute and put to vote with potential to embarrass leadership	Changes party conference procedures to end emergency motions raised at last minute and put to vote with potential to embarrass leadership

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

NINETY-THREE days and counting. No, not the time taken to form a new Belgian government (that's 110 days) but, as the *Eye* went to press, the period Gordon Brown has been in office without paying a courtesy visit to Brussels.

It's becoming embarrassing. Nicolas Sarkozy dropped into the European Commission just a week after becoming president of France, while Angela Merkel waited just one day after her appointment as German chancellor.

In fact, the *Eye* can reveal, a date *has* been agreed for a meeting between Brown and commission president José Manuel Barroso in October. But the two camps cannot agree on whether it should be in Brussels or London. In the meantime, a competition is under way to see who blinks first.

Barroso chose the Liberal Democrat party conference, of all venues, to deliver a message that Britain should not retreat to the European sidelines. Brown then said he would not show up at a meeting of EU and African heads of state if Robert Mugabe is on the guest list.

Brown is known in Brussels as truculent and only interested in Europe insofar as it suits Britain. But the current situation shows that Gordon's over-riding focus is not looking bad ahead of an election campaign. Any European controversy should be avoided – in particular tricky issues such as negotiations over the Reform Treaty, as EU constitution is now dubbed.

It is a moot point if this approach benefits Britain. At a recent briefing in Brussels, Sir Stephen Wall, Tony Blair's former EU adviser, said that the new prime minister's approach to Europe would be "Thatcherite". But, as one senior former diplomat said, Thatcher "was a forceful personality. But she rarely got her way. In the end, the casualty was her."

EU-phemisms

If the economy survives, we'll take all the credit. Otherwise we'll blame the Americans

HIGH PRINCIPALS

THE Loughborough University graduate who is donating his BAE-sponsored award to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade was Tom Taylor, not Tom Watson, as reported in the last High Principals. Apologies.

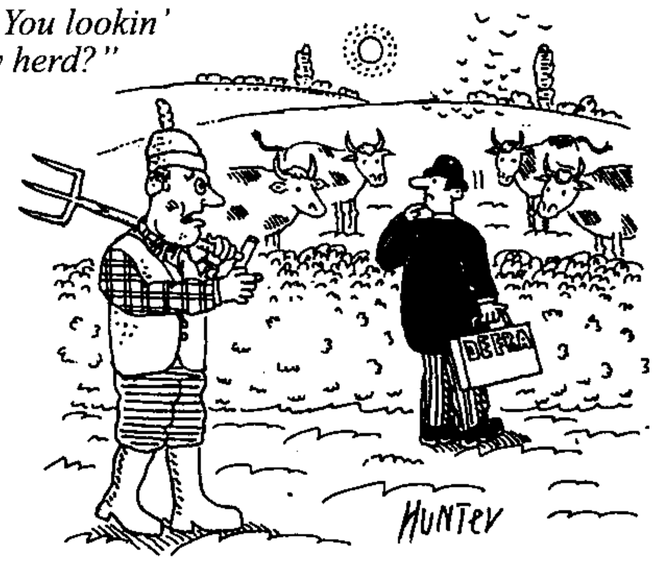
But our thanks to the *Eye* reader, himself a university scientist, who was so heartened by this rare display of student scruples he sent in a cheque to reimburse Mr Taylor with the full sum of the prize.

JUST FANCY THAT

IN *EYE* 1192 we printed a photo of Lib Dem Saj Karim demonstrating his green credentials by posing with plastic bottles at a glass-only bottle bank.

Sadly the amusing photo is now mysteriously absent from his website, perhaps removed to save unnecessary electricity – a worthy move by the North-West England Lib Dem MEP (and not MP, as we stated).

"Oi! You lookin' at my herd?"



Down on the Farm

ON SATURDAY 15 September, citizens of the Surrey village of Pyrford were baffled to be stopped by police and told they could not return home because they might be shot.

It seemed a Defra cull of local cattle suspected of foot and mouth disease had been badly botched when cows panicked at being shot at. After four animals escaped, police marksmen were combing the area. Eventually the poor creatures were tracked to the local golf course and gunned down.

Only a week earlier Defra's chief vet Debby Reynolds had claimed: "I'm satisfied that foot and mouth has been eradicated from the UK in 2007." This followed lavish praise showered on Ms Reynolds and Defra's staff by Gordon Brown, by Tory leader David Cameron and much of the media for the efficient way they had responded to the escape of FMD virus from the Pirbright site of the Institute of Animal Health. Mr Brown had been quick to insinuate that this could be blamed on Merial, the private firm which shares the laboratory site to make vaccines. On the day Ms Reynolds uttered her boast, a report by the Health and Safety Executive identified the cause of the escape as Pirbright's drainage system, long in need of repair. Blame for neglect of the drains lay not with Merial but with the site's owner, Defra. The problem had been drawn to Defra's attention, but since 2005 it had cut Pirbright's budget by a fifth, not leaving enough cash to repair the drains. Part of the reason for this was the £400m bill Defra has run up for the spectacular shambles it made over handing out EU subsidies to farmers. Brussels withheld this sum from the UK government; Gordon Brown, as chancellor, told Defra it would have to find the money from its existing budget; and Defra slashed its funding accordingly, including that to Pirbright. Thus, far from being able to claim credit for the way in which the FMD incident was handled, Mr Brown had his own part in the events which led to Pirbright's failure.

This failure was reinforced when, only a week after Ms Reynolds declared the UK FMD-free, the virus reappeared in Egham. The EU too was quick to criticise Pirbright's poor biosecurity, threatening to remove its status as the FMD "world reference centre", while conveniently overlooking the fact that legal responsibility for ensuring Pirbright's biosecurity lies ultimately with the EU's own Food and Veterinary Office. The reappearance of FMD, with the reimposition of the nationwide ban on animal movements, has been an unmitigated disaster for the livestock industry, costing farmers an estimated £10m a day. The sole cause of this massive financial loss has been the incompetence of Mr Brown's own government (compounded by its continuing refusal to allow the ring vaccination which could stop any spread of the disease dead in its tracks). Yet when Environment Secretary Hilary Benn was asked on the *Today* programme if the government was prepared to pay compensation, he explained that of course there would be compensation for any farmer whose animals were slaughtered. What Benn carefully didn't say was that not a penny of compensation would be available for those thousands of other farmers all over the country who continue to lose £70m a week through the knock-on effect of movement restrictions and the like – thanks entirely to the failure of Mr Brown, Mr Benn and their underlings to do their jobs properly.

'Muckspreader'

ITV

Torn (ITV1)

AS WE saw during the scandals over fake documentaries and quiz shows, newspapers just love to cause trouble for television, even when their charges are ridiculously hypocritical.

So no one should be shocked that, in the same editions in which the tabs were daily running pages of speculation and innuendo guaranteed to be offensive to the McCann family and their friends, they saw no contradiction in wondering aloud how ITV1 could possibly go ahead with the screening of **Torn**, a three-part drama about middle-class parents whose four-year-old daughter disappears when they're on holiday.

Get that for brass neck. While the papers wrote all their speculative rubbish after Madeleine McCann went missing, screenwriter Chris Lang is simply guilty of an unfortunate coincidence. What he wrote was never intended to have anything to do with the Portuguese story and, even by accident, really hasn't.

Roughly two minutes of action involve the parents finding their girl missing before the story jumps forward 11 years to the mother seeing a teenager in a shopping mall who looks like her kid. If anything, the script is indebted to recent Austrian and American cases in which lost toddlers have been returned to their parents as adolescents, but Her Majesty's press on its high horse does not make such distinctions. *Torn* became a "Maddy drama" which must surely be pulled from the schedules in case it upset anyone.

If this had been a BBC drama, it would have been dropped within hours. ITV, though, held firm, which probably shouldn't be surprising. In his Corporation days, Michael Grade once pointed out to a group of viewers bereaved by the Lockerbie disaster that it would be much easier if they simply watched something else when *Airplane!* was on rather than campaigning to persuade the BBC to take it off. His line – surely sensible – has always been that, while sensitive areas of an audience should be informed in advance of content that might distress them, they cannot be allowed a veto over everyone else.

But, having been congratulated for going ahead with the screening, the channel unfortunately can't be cheered for having made the drama in the first place. *Torn* was a step-by-step demonstration of everything that's wrong with ITV fiction these days.

The first of these sins is simplification. If parallels with the

"The secret to TV presenting is to talk to the viewer as if they're the only one watching... which in our case is also factually correct"

McCann affair caused any problem for *Torn*, it was that the real-life scenario made the invented one seem dull and perfunctory. When David and Sarah report that their Alice has gone missing while building a sandcastle, everyone just seems to accept that the little girl probably drowned, although the viewer knows the truth because it takes around 30 seconds for the camera-work to suggest not only that she was taken but also who took her. Now, the writer and producers must be kicking themselves they didn't have at least a first episode featuring the parents shifting from mourners to suspects.

But the reason that the storyline jumped in just two minutes from 1996 to 2007 is that, after a long period of falling ratings and advertising revenue, ITV dramas have become obsessed with moving as quickly as possible as a precaution against the audience getting bored. A year ago, *Torn* would have been played out in two two-hour parts on consecutive nights; but desperation has now driven them to try 60-minuters once a week, the formula which worked for ITV in the 1970s, although it's worth remembering that their biggest ever drama hit – *Morse*, in the 1980s – played over two hours, very slowly.

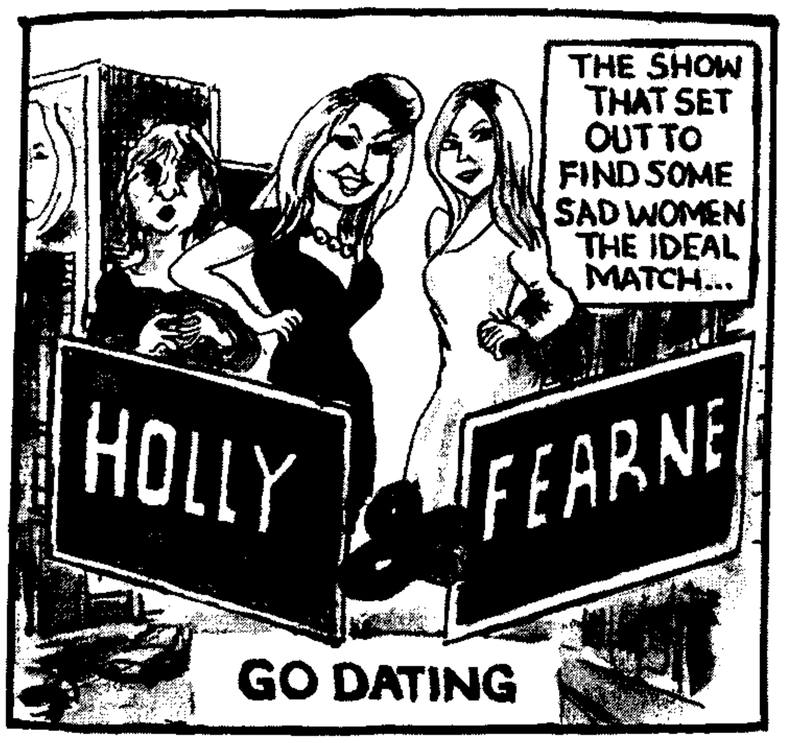
In *Torn*, though, everything happens so fast it feels as if ITV is going for a homegrown version of *24*, in which the timespan of each segment is 24 years. Conveniently noticing a birthmark on the arm of the teenager who may be the abductee, a detective has cracked the whole case between two commercial breaks. The alleged abductor then equally conveniently breaks down and admits the whole scam in a single speech, meaning that the drama has covered 11 years of family tragedy and a complex investigative and legal situation inside 58 minutes, leaving the second episode clear for a quite different drama about what it's like to get your lost child back.

This means that, despite the occasional striking line ("After six months, she stopped asking for her mum and dad"), the situation can never feel emotionally real, a problem increased by direction which mines every possible visual cliché of peak-time drama. When the husband looks too long at a work colleague, you know he's at risk of having an affair. The mother's longing glance at a glass of red wine reveals that she used to be an alcoholic.

Finally, such was the network's desperation to get viewers back for the second episode that the "next week on *Torn*" teaser was a giveaway, removing all hope of dramatic tension for those who saw it. The aggrieved group will at any rate be quite small: the content of the first six minutes will have done quite enough to put off most of the audience.

The drama's problem was not that it got too close to the news, but that it consistently remained too far away from life.

'Remote Controller'



GOING LIVE

BBC *Breakfast*'s Sarah Campbell waxed poetic last week on the banks of the Tamar when reporting the return of the rare lamprey fish to Cornish waters.

Campbell (*to a local fisherman*): So Alan, any lamprey fish?

Alan (*raking through a large fishing trap in the water*): Not today...

Campbell (*looking sheepish*): Well, they are rare... Here are some photos.

AD NAUSEAM

FOR an institution that was facing financial meltdown, Northern Rock spent the last six months splashing the cash on advertising with amazing abandon.

It kept poster and press campaigns running right until the game was up. Even on 28 August, less than three weeks before CEO Adam Applegarth was forced to apologise to customers in full-page newspaper ads, the bank was promoting itself in trade mags like *Mortgage Solution* with slots boasting that it was: "Open For Sub-Prime Business."

Throughout July it had persisted with a national press campaign enticing prospective customers with the assurance of unassailable security – "Give Me Risk-Free Saving" ran the headline. The bank had also been targeting the grey pound, inviting the over-50s to open online accounts as part of the same push. Needless to say it was the over-50s and the online savers who queued for hours at branches or were stranded at their PCs as internet sites crashed.

Ads for personal loans with the words "I'm a little bit short" were in papers well in to May, though no one then realised they might be referring to Northern Rock itself.

In retrospect, a page ad in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* publicising Northern Rock's sponsorship of Durham County Cricket Club was a hoot. Beneath the image of a batsman playing a shot was written in large type "ON A RUN." But far more embarrassing was the two-page ad that appeared in *Hello* magazine as late as 18 September featuring England rugby star Jonny Wilkinson and other members of his Rock-sponsored Newcastle Falcons squad. They were posing under the slogan "playtime is over". Given that Wilkinson was temporarily out of the world cup with an injured ankle, that England had just been butchered 36-0 by South Africa and that Northern Rock was in meltdown having sparked the first run on a British bank in more than 100 years, it's hard to know who would have been more embarrassed by the association.

DUMB BRITAIN

TalkSport

Jon Gaunt: Whereabouts in Italy are you from?

Caller: I'll give you a clue – it's where they produce Parma ham...

Gaunt: Ah! Milano!

Real Radio

Male presenter: Guess how many hours sleep you lose in a year looking after a new born baby.

Female presenter: What, in all 352 days?

Male presenter (laughing loudly): Don't you mean 356?

Female presenter: OK, in a leap year, right.

LBC 97.3, London

James O'Brien: Which song was made famous by the animated Raymond Briggs film, The Snowman?

Caller: Singing In The Rain.

MEDIA NEWS

WHICH of the following, in the opinion of BBC director-general Mark Thompson, is a "serious case of deception" and "bad faith or conscious effort to deceive"?

a) Naming a kitten with the second-most popular name in an online poll;

b) Reading out fictional names for competition winners on the radio because there weren't enough correct entries;

c) Inserting faked footage of a presenter to make it appear that he had been interviewing people he was not even in the room with?

To save us making up a convincing name for a winner, the correct answer is of course a) and b) which are firing offences (former *Blue Peter* editor Richard Marson and 6 Music boss Ric Blaxill lost their jobs), and not the one involving the corporation's creative director, Alan Yentob, who retains his £300,000 salary as well as the £20,000+ bonus he receives for presenting *Imagine*.

"Isn't it important to acknowledge that there can be artifice without deception?" asked Botney in an *Observer* piece – in which he conflated the practice of recording "noddies", or reaction shots, at the end of an interview a presenter has just conducted, and getting someone else to record fake ones several weeks later. Perhaps the best summary of his position comes from a January BBC press release: "A celebrated and award-winning programme maker, Alan came to personify the creative spirit of the BBC."

DID the TV crews covering Plaid Cymru's conference in Llandudno learn nothing from the recent telly fakery scandals?

The conference was Plaid's first since joining a coalition with Labour, so when Welsh assembly member (AM) Rhodri Glyn Thomas arrived it was as minister for heritage. This, TV crews believed, should have been a moment of triumph.

Unfortunately Plaid delegates at the scene failed to show enough excitement. Llanelli AM Helen Mary Jones explained on her blog: "There was a crowd of us waiting outside. It was kind of spoilt by the TV cameras asking us to greet him not once, but twice. Apparently we weren't whooping and clapping loudly enough the first time – and Rhodri was a bit embarrassed and went past us all too fast."

Alas, on the re-run the cameras got rather more than they were looking for: "On the second attempt, some people behind me resorted to screaming," Jones notes.

SPARE a thought for poor Clive "Don't Panic" Jones, chairman of GMTV, who is having to work hard to save the company just when he should be looking forward to retirement from the broadcasting industry.

Corporal Jones's dour performance at a staff briefing last Wednesday failed to impress newsroom hacks who interrupted his downbeat report to complain that his mumblings were inaudible. Perhaps he assumed that they'd rather not hear his tidings of woe: ratings at the breakfast-time broadcaster have fallen behind the BBC for the first time in memory, thanks to the phoney phone-in scandal. Worse for him, profits are *down*, and the staff Christmas bonus is under threat, as the company tries to mount a major campaign to win back the trust of migrating viewers. He has yet to decide whether to re-introduce competitions, but without them the prospects of returning to profit are bleak.

Not surprisingly, few volunteers have come forward to take up the post of managing director after Paul Corley did a Captain Oates at the behest of a furious board. So Corporal Jones has arranged for sales supremo Clive Crouch to act as a stand-in until a replacement can be found.

Crouch is just the man to restore confidence after all the scandals. A few years ago his then wife, Mary Crouch, "won" a free make-over on the Lorraine Kelly show usually given out to deserving hard-luck cases from among the viewers – rather than to the spouse of an executive whose current salary is not unadjacent to £370,000.

RADIO GA-GA

HOW is Radio One celebrating its entry into middle-age this month? As the station passes 40 (the very milestone, incidentally, after which it sacked Tony Blackburn for being too old) it welcomes a bevy of new faces – and they are faces rather than voices, recruited from the small screen.

JK and Joel, hailed as "the two hottest properties in UK broadcasting" when they were hired in 2004, have been kicked out and will hand over the *Chart Show* to Fearne Cotton and Reggie Yates, the presenting duo who killed *Top of the Pops* on BBC1 and are presumably returning to finish off the Top 40 for good.

Sunday Surgery, the teen advice show presented by Dr Mark Hamilton, will now be co-hosted by Kelly Osbourne, though it is unclear whether it is her televised rehab stints as a teenager or her inept efforts helming Sky's *Project Catwalk* that qualify her for the job. Sunday mornings will be handed over to creamy muck-muck merchants Dick and Dom, proving that the tide that once carried Noel Edmonds and Jimmy Savile over from radio to kids' TV is now very definitely flowing in the opposite direction.

It's not as if they can get decent TV presenters, either. Like so much else, Radio Two has stolen them – Dermot O'Leary and Russell Brand, both known to the teen crowd from *Big Brother*, were snapped up by the second network, leaving Radio 1 with the lacklustre Vernon Kay, a man who has bagged employment as a model, TV presenter and now DJ without displaying obvious talent for any of them.

At least the station's flagship presenters, breakfast and drivetime hosts Chris Moyles and Scott Mills, show genuine affection for – as well as technical proficiency in – the medium of radio. More importantly, they also enthral the station's 15- to 24-year-old target audience (Moyle's audience grew to a record 7.26m this summer) while actively repelling the over-30s, who can generally only stomach around ten teeth-grinding minutes of boasting, bullying and wilful idiocy before diving for the dial. Should they also find themselves reflecting that Edmonds was doing the sort of prank phonecalls in which Mills specialises three decades ago, they would know it's truly pipe and slippers time.

Sandwiched between the two is Jo Whiley, whose age – 42 – would be irrelevant were it not for her employer's obsession with demographics and her habit of behaving like an embarrassing auntie trying to gatecrash the teenagers' party in the bedroom rather than knock back Merlot with the grown-ups downstairs. In a world where mums buy the same Coldplay albums from Tesco that their kids illegally download at home, this shouldn't matter so much, but she can't help reminding listeners of the topic – one of her regular features, a round-up of urban myths, is titled "Marilyn Manson never appeared on the *Wonder Years*", an American sitcom which finished its run in 1993, when the youngest members of her intended audience were just being born.

Meanwhile Whiley's unseemly enthusiasm for anything that has been championed in the *NME*, on MySpace, or just by a deep-pocketed record company's promotions department smacks less of her preferred slogan, "In New Music We Trust", than "The Station That Isn't Afraid To Try Popular New Things".

What of the evenings? The vocal affectations of night-time specialists such as Zane Lowe and Tim Westwood cannot hide their knowledge and enthusiasm for their genres. Post-Peel, however, eclecticism has been abandoned for niche programming – "Leftfield Dance"; "Upfront D&B"; "Breaks, Grime and Electronica" – with some of it dumped all the way over on digital channel 1Extra (as disapproving Mercury prize winner Dizzee Rascal puts it, "the station for the blacks").

Ah yes, John Peel. The station's adulation for its longest serving DJ (the anniversary will see yet another celebration of his life) is at odds with its treatment of him prior to his death, when his show was shunted back to the wrong side of midnight, a schedule he told friends was "killing me".

The second-most ancient staffer, 1970 veteran Annie Nightingale (2-4am, Mondays) will be allowed an excursion into daylight on anniversary day to reprise her 1980s *Request Show*, but only with a colleague in her 20s there to keep a watchful eye. The last time station controller Andy Parfitt liberated his listeners from the 48-song daytime playlist and allowed them to ask for exactly what they wanted, during the *Ten Hour Takeover* in August 2005, they plumped for Bachman-Turner Overdrive next to The Shamen, the Clash and Run DMC. Where is the BBC station that plays that sort of mix in the daytime (and don't say 6Music, a digital station with so few listeners it has to make up its own competition winners)? And under the BBC's public service remit, shouldn't there still be one?

'Yoof'

FORMER BBC sports commentator Barry Davies was on Eamonn Holmes's Saturday morning radio show on Five Live recently to discuss his newly published autobiography.

After a few minutes, however, the pair suddenly went off at a tangent to discuss the Betfair Turbo Tennis tournament taking place later that day.

Fact: the managing director of Betfair is Mark Davies, son of... Barry Davies.

NUMBER CRUNCHING

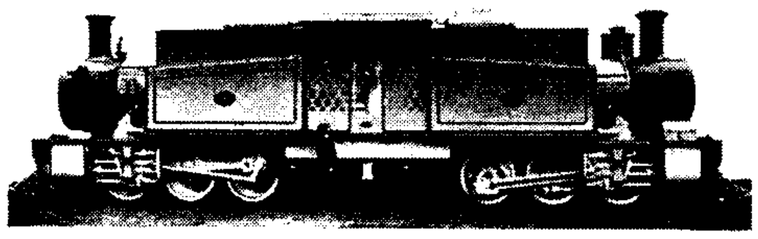
£250m Amount BBC plans to save by 10% cut in 'content creation'

£250m Amount BBC spent setting up BBC Three

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

OH WELL, ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST!
LONDON FASHION WEEK
LONDON FASHION WEEK
YES- IT'S ALL THEY'RE ALLOWED TO EAT!
CRUNCH CRUNCH



SIGNAL FAILURES

Message in a bottleneck

TWO of the biggest faults in Britain's rail network are delays and shortage of capacity. So why are officials ignoring a proposal that could tackle both at the notorious Birmingham New Street bottleneck?

In July the government announced a £120m plan to "tackle congestion" there. But as the cash is for a bigger station concourse, it won't improve the inadequate tracks at Birmingham New Street (BNS), the busy meeting point of trains from Scotland, Wales and most English regions, where delays ripple out to affect passengers hundreds of miles away.

BNS occupies a hole between sets of tunnels. There are only four tracks into the station from the east; and when the Bullring shopping centre was rebuilt, Railtrack (interested only in its next annual results) spurned the chance to ensure extra tracks could be provided in future (Eye 992). Now rail bosses and their civil service masters reckon they can increase train capacity, despite the bottleneck, by lengthening the trains. But there are snags. BNS can just about cope with today's timetables because platforms can accommodate two trains at a time. If trains are substantially longer, two together will be too long for the platforms.

In addition, signals need renewing. Platform sharing at BNS doesn't match current safety guidelines but continues under "grandfather rights"; and new signals will presumably have to meet modern standards which preclude shared platforms. BNS's capacity will thus fall and delays will rise unless fewer trains are scheduled.

Engineering firm Ove Arup has suggested a new station on mostly brownfield land the other side of BNS's eastern tunnels. Arup has worked on new stations in overseas cities, and in 1990 acted on its own initiative to propose an alternative route to British Rail's for the Chunnel rail link. BR took the proposal seriously and Arup's route into St Pancras is the one that opens this autumn.

Arup's Birmingham station idea is also uncommissioned. The station would provide some platforms for trains crossing the city but most trains from the south, east and north would use dead-end platforms – avoiding the tunnel bottleneck. The station concourse would connect to Moor Street station, for easy interchange with the Marylebone-Kidderminster line. Construction would cause little disruption to passengers (unlike upgrading BNS).

The new station would be further than BNS from the city's commercial core but close to the Bullring centre, and the east side (around the proposed station) is lined up for regeneration. In July developers applied for planning consent to use the area for shops, offices, housing and car parks – but no station. The two aren't mutually exclusive, but the buildings would have to fit around the station. The station would probably aid east-side regeneration while BNS's subsequent reduction would allow bigger property development there.

But Arup's proposal has had no official consideration. It may or may not be the best solution, but it at least deserves an independent review to compare it with the alternatives, such as a costly station in a new tunnel under BNS. The refusal of government, Network Rail and local officials to acknowledge Arup's work means land won't even be safeguarded for a future generation to build an east-side station. Railtrack has gone but its short-termism lives on.

AFTER the dismal performance of First Great Western, First Group has replaced FGW managing director Alison Forster. Her new job is… to direct rail performance for the whole of FirstGroup.

Meanwhile politicians and passengers in West Lothian are so cheesed off with WorstGroup cancelling buses to Edinburgh at short notice they threatened to call in the traffic commissioner. Passengers might instead like to try the trains between West Lothian and Edinburgh. They're run by… FirstGroup, and First ScotRail has been fined £474,000 for missed service targets in the first half of this year.

'Dr B Ching'

NEWS FROM THE SANDPIT

IT'S no surprise to the lads that 16,000 Territorial Army troops have quit the army since the 2003 invasion of Iraq, leaving a shortage that is felt keenly in the regular units that rely on reservists to bring them up to strength.

Civvies from the "bring the boys home now" lobby conclude that this is a sign that reservists don't want to take part in an unpopular war. This is a simplistic view. In fact, a far more likely reason for the exodus can be found in the way the TA is treated by both the regular army and the Ministry of Defence both at home and on ops overseas.

Reservists get a pretty raw deal. They train as units at home, but are deployed on an individual basis in order to "plug the line". They lose track of mates as well as the support and aftercare that their TA units are supposed to supply.

Officers in the TA have also seen their morale collapse. Commanders in theatre concentrate on the lower ranks, especially in the infantry, leaving the "part time Ruperts" behind to concentrate on paperwork.

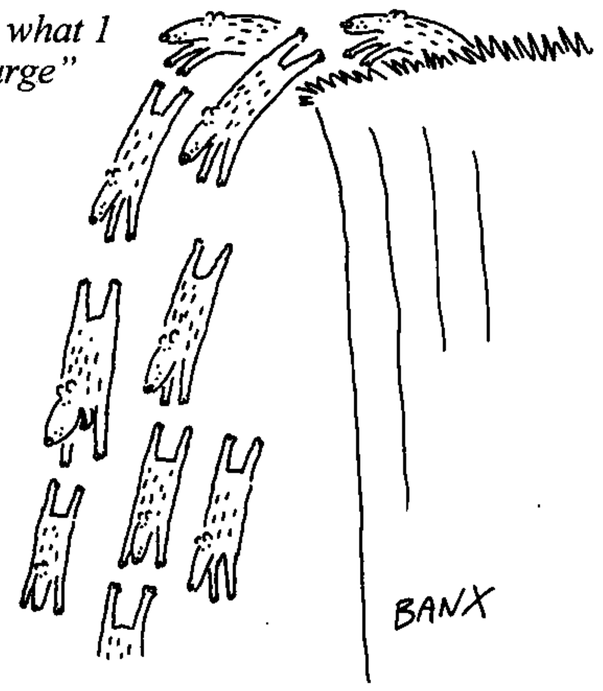
The reservists who do get to the Sandpit are often the last to be equipped with body armour. They face restrictions on the amount of ammunition they can carry. And they get paid even less than the £42 a day trousered by regular privates on ops. Oh, and they also continue to pay council tax while serving in theatre. Meanwhile "senior civil servants" working at the MoD in Whitehall have pocketed £3.5m in bonuses in the past four years. None of this is good for morale.

No exceptions are made by the Child Support Agency for reservists in theatre, despite loss of earnings and, regardless of the Reserve Forces Act which guarantees that an employer must take a reservist back at the end of a tour, many businesses refuse to promote them, arguing that with increasingly repeated mobilisations it is not in their interest to do so.

The government has announced a freeze on recruiting for the TA in 2008, excluding those whose skills are needed in Iraq and the 'Stan. How they can distinguish between professional soldiery in general and these two theatres of operations in particular is a vexing question.

'Squarebasher'

*"This is what I **call** a surge"*



EADY DOES IT

THE most relentless opponent of free speech in England is not MI5, the Downing Street press office or the Muslim Council of Britain but Mr Justice Eady who has found against reporters so often that the law lord Lord Hoffman slapped him down for being "hostile" to responsible journalism in the public interest.

This time the man putting Eady in the spotlight is the *Eye*'s old friend Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz. As we reported in the last issue, the Saudi plutocrat has used the English libel courts to punish authors who repeat the claim by the US Treasury that his charity funded terrorism – a libellous allegation, he says, because he was not involved in the running of the charity.

Among the many books he has gone to law over is *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop it*, by Dr Rachel Ehrenfeld. He sued in 2004 and Eady duly ordered Ehrenfeld to apologise, retract and pay bin Mahfouz $225,913 in costs and damages.

Mahfouz's victory was less breathtaking than the fact that Eady agreed to hear the case at all. Ehrenfeld is an American and *Funding Evil* was published by an American house. There was no British edition and no promotion of the book in Britain. Mahfouz would have lost if he had sued in America, where freedom of speech is respected and public figures can't win unless they prove an author acted with reckless disregard for the truth.

Eady, however, allowed Mahfouz to sue in London, where the presumption of guilt falls on the defendant's shoulders, because British readers had ordered copies from the US via Amazon – 23 readers, to be precise.

Eady worked on the assumption that Mahfouz was a well thought-of man with a reputation to lose, even though the Saudi had been caught up in the BCCI banking scandal and agreed to pay a fine of $225m in return for the US authorities dropping fraud charges. Ehrenfeld refused to leave America because as "a matter of principle I will not submit to a legal system less protective of free speech than our own". Eady found for Mahfouz nevertheless – the first ever declaration of falsehood in a case that had not been contested before a judge and jury.

Now Ehrenfeld is fighting back. A brief submitted by her lawyers to the court of appeals of the state of New York for a hearing later this year asks the judges to declare that Eady's judgments are unenforceable in the US. It describes Mahfouz as a "serial libel tourist", part of a "mounting and insidious trend when a person, usually prominent and wealthy, heads to London" to exploit an authoritarian law.

The American press is on Ehrenfeld's side. The veteran reporters Mark Hosenball and Michael Isikoff cite the combination of Saudi money and English judges as a potent threat to investigative journalism. They fear that if Eady isn't challenged, a climate of fear will develop and American publishers will refuse to sell hard-hitting books on the internet in case they reach England.

Ehrenfeld describes in her brief how Mahfouz's agents told her and her publishers that they must destroy all copies of the book. On one occasion, she alleges, a man came to her home in New York and told her: "You had better respond. Sheikh bin Mahfouz is a very important person and you ought to take good care of yourself."

Somewhat strangely for a foreigner who brought a case in London against a book published elsewhere, Mahfouz will argue that the US courts don't have jurisdiction to hear the case.

If Ehrenfeld wins, libel lawyers will lose a lot of money and American editors and journalists will be mightily relieved. If she loses, libel lawyers will become richer still, as ever more Saudi billionaires, scientologists and sex-mad upstarts flock to the royal courts of justice to ask Mr Justice Eady to control what is said about them, not just in England, but across the whole wide world.

'Ratbiter'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

DEMOLITION BALLS

MORE from Salford, where "market renewal" is bringing hundreds of terraced houses under the ball and chain and exiling members of established communities (*Eye* 1193).

At the Broughton Green development, a partnership between Salford city council, Royal Bank of Scotland, Inpartnership and City Spirit, sweetened with £13m "housing market renewal" funds, new houses are in the £235,000 to £480,000 range.

In the surviving old streets a government inspector has approved the council's wish for compulsory purchase orders and demolitions to prise out existing residents. The inspector's report concluded: "There is a low demand for current housing stock and a dearth of potential buyers." A few weeks later a local estate agent put up a "For Sale" sign in error on one of the doomed "unpopular" terraces. Within hours he'd had 15 inquiries.

In Lower Broughton, site of a £500m partnership between Salford council and Countryside Properties, streets have been cleared to make way for "Supurbia", with "prices starting at as little as £161,950" ("rich pickings for wealthy buyers" – *Times*). One of the plum sites is Spike Island, next to the River Irwell. In this area of so-called "unpopular and out-of-date housing", one tenant decided last year to purchase his house under "right to buy". He was quoted £24,500 after his 60 percent tenant's discount. It took him nearly a year to get the money together. When he went back to the council he was quoted more than double that figure. The council told him the new price reflected the rise in property values in the area – where there is supposed to be "no demand" for older houses.

● DAME Shirley Porter, we hear, is looking for a hack to ghost her autobiography and put her side of the story of the Westminster "homes for votes" scandal of the 1980s.

If Dame Tesco is going to write her version of events, she had better get on with it. Novelist Deborah Moggach has been commissioned by the BBC to write a screen version of Andrew Hosken's definitive account of the affair, *Nothing Like a Dame*, for broadcast next year. Meanwhile Roger Rosewell, the former Trot who became Porter's closest adviser in her Westminster days, has forged a new career writing about medieval Italian church art. From Tescos to frescos, as it were.

MAN OF STRAW

SPUD farmer Terry Waters, a member of the planning committee on Tory-controlled Forest Heath council in Suffolk, is himself at the centre of a long-standing planning dispute with neighbours in the village of Mildenhall.

They allege their lives are made a misery by noise from the speedway track and motocross circuit on his land, which operate long beyond their permitted hours in the evenings and at weekends.

Among Cllr Waters' nearest neighbours are Ray and Kate Lawrence, who have campaigned for Forest Heath's chief executive David Burnip to get his officers to take action against the "unabated noise nuisance". Last week Cllr Waters at last did something to "abate" the noise from his land – he erected a massive 12ft high wall of straw bales along the border of the Lawrences' property, diminishing the noise of revving motorbikes but

also blocking their light and view. The Lawrences think Cllr Waters is taking the piss. No pleasing some people, is there?

STANTON BY

SOME comfort for Southwark chief executive Annie Shepperd as she suffers the embarrassment of a scathing district auditor's report on her performance in her old job as chief exec at Walsall.

Sheppard, says Walsall DA Peter Gregory, was in the habit of "expressing views without first seeking advice", took decisions on the flimsiest legal basis and ignored the concerns of whistleblower Peter Francis, who had highlighted a string of apparent financial irregularities. Shepperd's attitude increased the unfair dismissal settlement – nearly £650,000 – won by the sacked regeneration manager last December.

But at least Shepperd – who bizarrely took and passed a US Air Force lie detector test before answering the DA's questions – has the support of Southwark's Lib Dem leader Nick Stanton. "I have every confidence in her," he told the council. Ooher. Weeks earlier Stanton expressed equally firm support for former mayor Denise Capstick (*Eye* 1191). He persuaded her to stay on as £43,000-a-year health supremo despite her having pleaded guilty to drink-driving with almost double the permitted level of alcohol. "After all, she didn't crash," he told hacks. Sadly Capstick was forced to resign after a councillors' revolt.

Stanton has been an admirer of Sheppard ever since she voted Southwark the "Most Improved Council" in the 2005 *Local Government Chronicle* awards (*Eye* 1165), despite it being subject of a highly critical report by Lord Ouseley about rampant racism. It's good to have friends!

● LABOUR-RUN Greenwich council is spending £34,000 on smart grey uniforms for its 200 library staff. But the town hall unions are not, er, wearing it, because neither they nor the public were consulted. Irritated saaf London bibliophiles have two questions: 1) why isn't the money being spent on books; and 2) what's wrong with the uniform that has served generations of librarians so well – cardigans and corduroys?

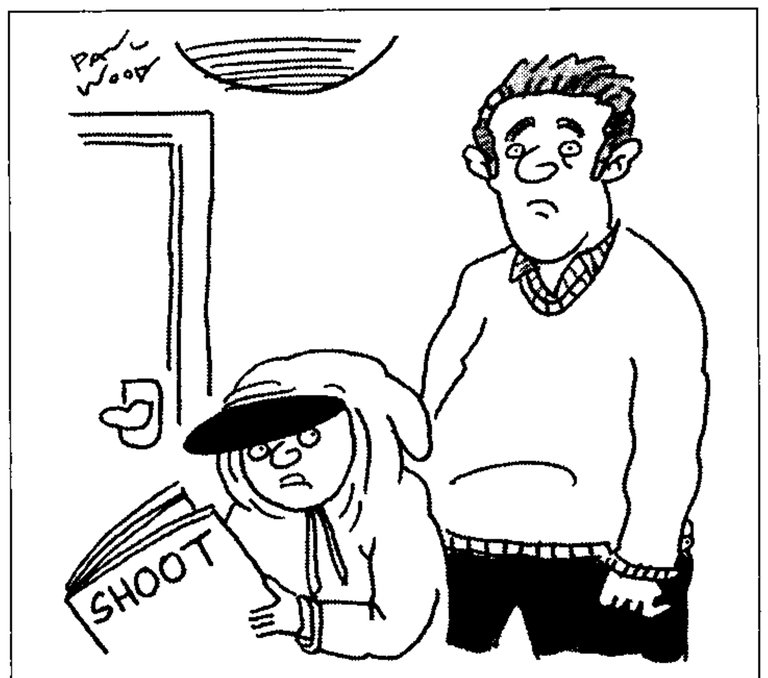
WAILING WALLS

PETER WALLS, chief executive of the Gentoo housing association – formerly Sunderland Housing Group – has been finding yet more work for law firm Olswang.

After a reporter for the Newcastle *Sunday Sun* interviewed Walls following his arrest for allegedly threatening to kill rival housing association boss John Finn – an allegation Walls denies (*Eye* 1193) – the paper received a letter from Olswang, *before* publication, demanding the story be pulled because it was bound to be libellous. Yet Olswang shurely knows that a straight report of a police statement could be expected to be "privileged" – ie immune to legal action – regardless of the ultimate veracity of any allegations referred to?

Following publication of the story, 70 Sunderland councillors received another letter in which Dave Crawford, chairman of the Gentoo group, made allegations about Finn that might themselves have been thought to be defamatory. This, however, arrived on Gentoo-headed paper, Olswang having nothing to do with it.

Meanwhile, Sunderland's housing problems continue to fester.



"Football? What makes you think it's a magazine about football?"

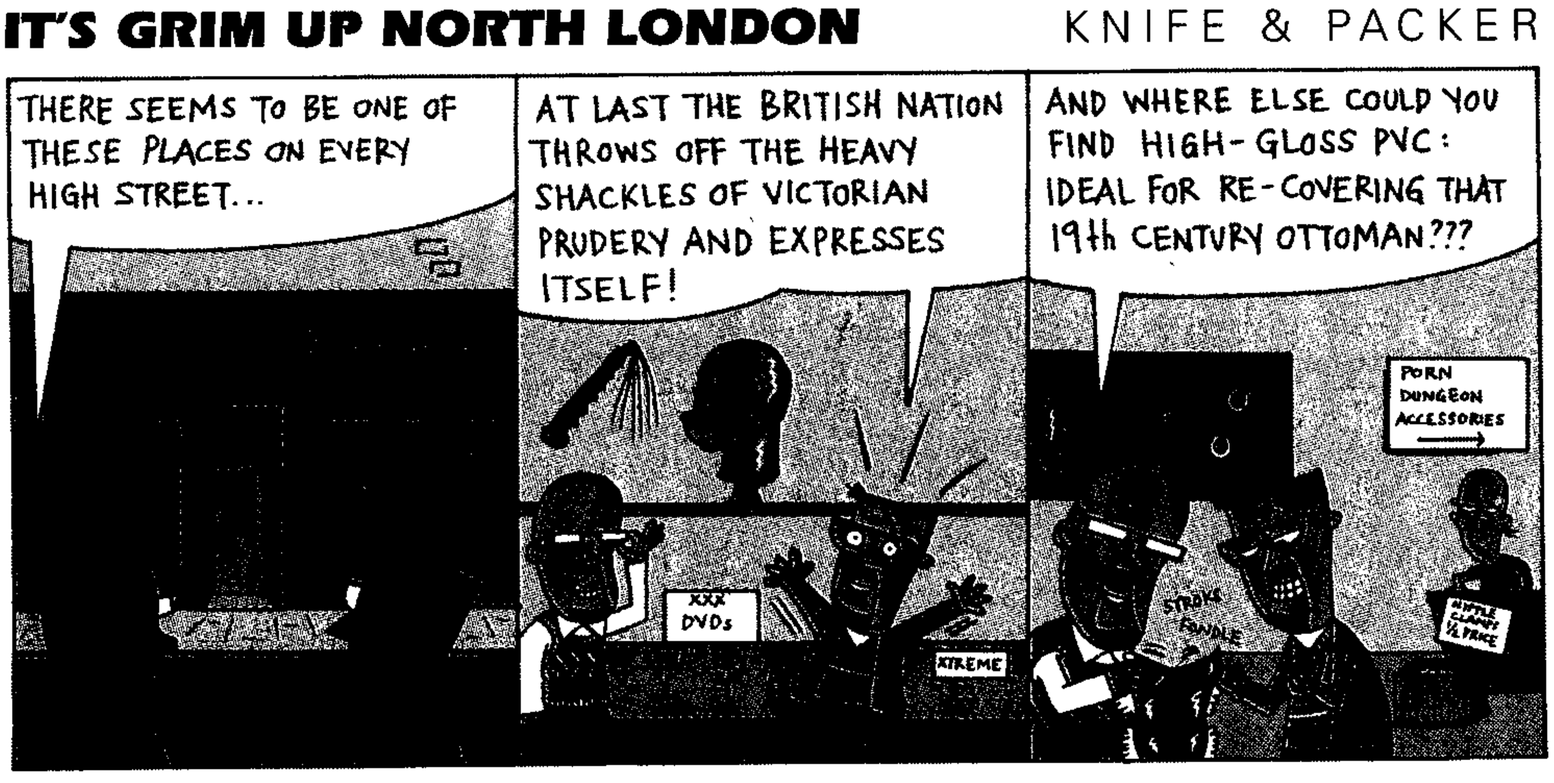
ROWELLING HOME

THE Isle of Wight's "strategic director of environmental and technical services", Derek Rowell, seems to have pre-empted the outcome of an eight-month probe into dodgy contracts with consultants High-Point Rendel (*Eyes passim*).

Suspended along with a number of other senior colleagues, Rowell has been signed off sick with "stress" but appears to have embarked on that most stressful of operations, moving house. He has bought a home in North Yorkshire near Scarborough, the scene of a debacle for him four years ago when he was involved in another multi-million-pound High-Point Rendel scandal (*Eyes passim*). Perhaps he knows something IoW council taxpayers don't?

Meanwhile IoW council leader Andy Sutton has been deposed and replaced by his deputy, David Pugh, in the fallout from a controversial planning decision that saw fellow Tory councillor Anne Bishop get permission to convert her failing hotel in Shanklin into lucrative flats, despite officers recommending refusal. The council's legal supremo Alison Lowton (formerly of Camden – see *Eyes passim)* has warned that there is a "risk of an appearance of bias" after allegations that members of the planning committee may have been lobbied to get the application pushed through.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


THERE SEEMS TO BE ONE OF THESE PLACES ON EVERY HIGH STREET...
AT LAST THE BRITISH NATION THROWS OFF THE HEAVY SHACKLES OF VICTORIAN PRUDERY AND EXPRESSES ITSELF!
AND WHERE ELSE COULD YOU FIND HIGH-GLOSS PVC: IDEAL FOR RE-COVERING THAT 19th CENTURY OTTOMAN???
XXX DVDs
XTREME
PORN DUNGEON ACCESSORIES

NOOKS and CORNERS

TAMESIDE metropolitan borough council, in whose fiefdom sits Ashton-under-Lyne near Manchester, boasts in its annual report for 2005-06 that one of its "main achievements" in dealing with "bereavement services" is that it demolished the chapel in the town's main cemetery in Hurst to create a garden of remembrance.

Did it ever occur to Tameside it might have been a finer achievement simply to have repaired this Gothic Revival building, designed by T.D. Lindley and opened in 1892? Such Victorian structures give character and a sense of purpose to cemeteries, whereas most gardens of remembrance are as bleak and depressing as the modern crematoria they often accompany.

The real reason Tameside pulled down the long-neglected chapel is that demolition was cheaper than repair and care. But two other factors are at play. One is the modern British reluctance to think about death. Thus, when they are not neglected and vandalised, cemeteries are ruthlessly tidied up and made bland and municipal, with neatly mown lawns. Death and decay are not nice to contemplate, so the interiors of modern British crematoria have all the character of a suburban lounge.

At Ashton, not content with destroying the old cemetery chapel, gravestones deemed too unsafe for our Health and Safety culture (which is destroying interesting cemetery monuments all over Britain) are being gratuitously supported "in an upright position" by hideous metal "temporary support systems" for four months. "Whilst the memorial is supported, attempts are then made to contact the Grave Owner to take the necessary action," is the official line. But at least one family, resident in the same house in Ashton for more than half a century, was never contacted after their grave was disfigured.

The other explanation for Tameside's behaviour is its hopeless Philistine incompetence. Look up Ashton-under-Lyne in the new *Buildings of England* volume for south-east Lancashire and you will read that: "The C20 has not been kind to the town, with busy roads cutting parts of the centre off, the Council offices and shopping precinct spoiling the look of the market square… Mammon has even made a car park out of the parish churchyard." And so on. The west end of the town has been in a bad way for years; but rather than encourage regeneration, Tameside's answer is to compulsorily purchase the premises of the businesses that were hanging on and demolish them in favour of a new business park called "St Petersfield" half a mile away. This no doubt suits Ask Property Developments which is building it.

Meanwhile fine buildings in the town centre remain neglected: in particular the spectacular Public Baths (pictured), an ambitious Italianate-cum-Byzantine pile of 1870-71 by Paull & Robinson whose chimney is made to look like the campanile of Siena town hall. Like so many other fine old pools, this amazing building was closed 35 years ago and, idiotically, the swimming pool covered by a magnificent hammerbeam roof was filled with concrete so there is little chance of it reopening as a pool. However, as it is listed at grade II*, it has not been demolished and Tameside has merely neglected it and failed to find a new use for it. Now it has been made to face the ghastly new magistrates' court across a new open space which ignores the Georgian grid-plan of the town. The new "Pevsner" remarks that: "It has been empty and derelict for years. Saving it would help atone for sins committed against other Ashton-under-Lyne buildings". Some hope.

One last thing: Ashton Market Hall burned down three years ago. At last it is being rebuilt after much prevarication and Tameside has appointed Laing O'Rourke as contractor – the firm with dubious conservation expertise in whose hands the Midland Grand Hotel at St Pancras recently went on fire (*Eye* 1191).

BAD NEWS for the artists who occupy Stockwell Studios in south London.

These studios are in what was once the Clapham Maternity Hospital, founded in 1889 by Dr Annie McCall, one of the first 50 women allowed to qualify in medicine. The main building was designed in 1915 in a Georgian manner, and it was extended in 1938 by Gertrude Leverkus, one of the first women to qualify as an architect. Two years earlier, the institution had been renamed the Annie McCall Hospital after its founder. The hospital closed in 1970 and since 1991 the buildings in Jeffrys Road have been owned by Lambeth council. For the last 20 years they have been "benevolently squatted" by the Stockwell Artists.

For some years Lambeth has contemplated selling the former hospital to a housing association for conversion into flats, but has always indicated that the buildings should retain a community use and that the artists should be rehoused on the site. But now the council has decided to sell to a developer, Capital & Provident, who has announced that the buildings are unsafe and must be demolished so new flats by Fielden Clegg Bradley can be built. Oddly, the Stockwell artists commissioned a survey a few years earlier which indicated that the buildings were perfectly sound. And the favoured developer declines to show the new structural survey to the artists. What a surprise!

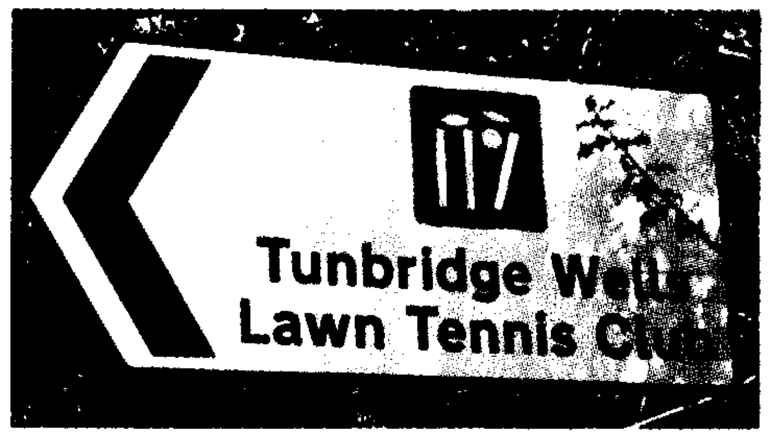
'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Thousands of immobile figures, waiting patiently for an eternity...
BRITISH MUSEUM
THE TERRACOTTA ARMY
Why can't they go to Something more cutting edge?
Beats me.
ENTRANCE

I-SPY *Kent*



Submitted by Patrick Cleary. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

AS ANYBODY in the music business knows, the greatest baton-wavers tend to be the most tyrannical. Furtwängler, Toscanini, Karajan all put the fear of God into their players. They stormed and raged, and in the process made some heart-stopping performances.

But now, it seems, they can't. The former conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Gerard Schwarz, is facing legal action from a violinist in the Seattle Symphony Orchestra who filed a lawsuit claiming Schwarz "constantly, continuously and persistently" harassed him over several years, causing "intentional emotional distress".

A trial is due this week. The violinist, Peter Kaman, who has been with the orchestra for more than 20 years, has lined up a posse of witnesses to testify that Schwarz is, as the lawsuit claims, a "stern taskmaster" with a tendency not just to verbal but to physical abuse and public humiliation.

Schwarz is hardly an orchestral players' pin-up these days – especially not in Liverpool, where he left under a cloud after RLPO musicians blackmailed him with a vote of no confidence and asked managers not to renew his contract.

But if the case goes against him, it will send a message to maestros throughout the world and the orchestral boards that hire them. No more screaming or stamping of the foot. Just hugs and kisses of a mild, encouraging and, naturally, non-sexual kind.

A SPOT of encouragement wouldn't come amiss just now at Radio 3, plunged into gloom yet again by news of ever-falling listening figures.

From April to June this year the number of adult listeners fell by 6.3 percent to just over 1.7m – the lowest on record and particularly bad given that elsewhere UK radio listening figures were rising.

Radio 3's publicity office has been trotting out all sorts of excuses, largely to do with interpreting statistics. But the worry remains. Attempts by Radio 3 controller Roger Wright to win new audiences are looking misguided, with no evidence of success and the hard core of listeners feeling patronised and alienated by what they see as "dumbing down".

Some of the bars will remain open at the East Stand for two hours after games are finished to allow for a more staggered exit from the stadium.

Edinburgh Evening News

Letters

Muck-up

Sir,

'Mucksprеader' accuses me of failing to understand set-aside, on the basis of a recent radio report I did. I do, however, wonder whether he actually listened to the piece in question.

He says I have confused set-aside with buffer strips. I didn't, and that was perfectly clear in the report.

He then says that the non-food crops requirement for set-aside appears to have passed me by. In fact, this was one of the main points of the piece, and I mentioned it several times.

Yours sincerely,
SARAH MUKHERJEE,

Shepreth, Herts.

Trouble with Hari

Sir,

I have a suggestion for your "How the Media Works" section. Every time my friend Johann Hari has criticised Private Eye, its editor or its former editor in print, a bizarre smear has appeared against him the next week in Private Eye. In effect you work in precisely the way you condemn in others.

Your most recent largely untrue story (Eye 1191) was triggered by a disagreement Hari had with Nick Cohen about his book "What's Left". Hari appealed for Cohen to stop writing bonkers articles complaining there aren't enough Muslim villains in Hollywood films, and instead confront the reality of the situation in Iraq. Cohen responded by bizarrely calling him "Maoist" and then disputed one tiny detail (about the degree to which he claims to be Orwell's heir) in what was otherwise a serious, intelligent 5000-word review.

Somehow, the reality of this exchange didn't come out in Private Eye's account. (Could it be because your article was in fact written by a close personal friend of Cohen?) Instead, you offer a bizarre and feeble set of claims about Hari to smear him. You point out that – shock! horror! – he years ago repeated a story that had been in over 100 newspapers, including the New York Times, that later turned out to be false. When it turned out to be false, he immediately ran a correction. Are you suggesting that columnists should track down the source of every story that is widely reported? They would never write anything.

Private Eye performs a really important function in monitoring the British media. But when you smear honest journalists with daft stories just because they criticise you and your mates, I'm afraid you become as bad as the people you should be exposing.

Yours sincerely,
CHRIS HAYDON,

Via email.

Series error

Sir

In a departure from your usual extremely high standards, you suggest that Nigella Lawson sales contract with John Lewis had led to product placement in her new series.

This is categorically untrue. Nigella's cookware range is sold through numerous high street retailers, one of which is John Lewis, and there is absolutely no product placement in the series. I'd like to take this opportunity to reassure you that the programme is compliant within BBC guidelines.

Yours faithfully,
HELLEN MARTIN, BBC PRESS OFFICE

Via email

Bad taste special

Sir,

Re the cartoon on page 30 of the latest issue. I know there are few taboos in humour but I believe child abuse should be one of them.

Yours,
VERONICA DUMONT,

Via email.

Sir,

Normally I can't be bothered to write, but now I understand why people do – issue 1193, the scum whisperer cartoon was hilarious. Yobs was tragic. If you lose your readers in the 10s, 100s or 1000s on the basis that they cannot find anything to laugh about in baby kicking, I wouldn't be at all surprised.

But what *were you thinking of? How does/did it make you smile?*

Yours in dumbstruck amazement,
DR CAROLINE BROWN (SENIOR LECTURER PSYCHOLOGY),

Via email.

Lookalike

Hood

Applegarth

Sir,

I wonder if any of your readers have noticed the striking resemblance between The Hood, erstwhile bad man from the Gerry Anderson's TV series "Thunderbirds" and Adam Applegarth, Chief Executive of Northern Rock. How could a banker possibly be related to a 1960's puppet representation of a ne'er do well? I feel we should be told.

Yours sincerely,
RICHARD DORSET,

Newcastle.

Porn crackers

Sir,

I suggest that you might actually want to do some audience research before making presumptions like "the audience for Nigella's shows is middle-aged men who think she's hotter than their wives' stoves and like it when she does that fellatio thing with her fingers after cleaning out the bowl".

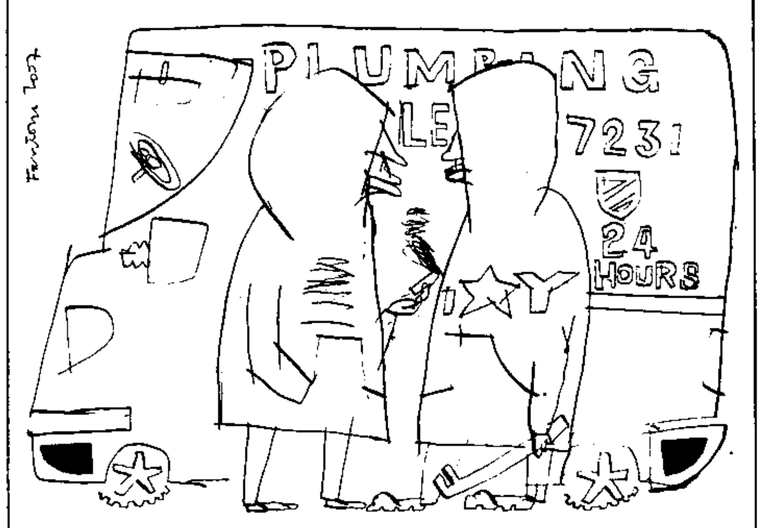
I am a sixteen-year-old girl who operates in a social circle where chewing gum and Ribena Really Light is the diet of choice if you want to be anything close to attractive.

The reason I like Nigella is nothing to do with the location of her kitchen, whether it's hers or not – I like the generous, nourishing bowls of food she produces and how she justifies how pleasurable they are by doing what my Grandma does and sticking a finger in to taste as she cooks.

It is such a refreshing change and role model to girls of my age to see a beautiful, fuller-figured woman who embraces her food and enjoys cooking it, regardless of the latest celebrity fad diet. It therefore appals me that the general response is to label her programmes as "food porn". I doubt if a male chef, father of two who had lost his wife, mother and sister to cancer tasted some sauce with a finger he would then be bombarded with sexual innuendoes.

Obviously, Nigella's shows are for television so the recipes are bound to be aesthetically pleasing and edited to fit into thirty-minute slots

Scenes You Seldom See



"Just think. If we nick this bloke's tools he might not be insured, can't afford new ones and we will be putting him out of work"

but how can you criticise her for being unpractical when I doubt anyone wants to watch fish fingers and chips being made on television, furthermore I have nearly all her cookery books and find them full of honest, sensible advice and the food I've made from them has always been superb.

I just hope this denigration of a successful, self-confident woman fuelled by either chauvinism or jealousy doesn't prevent other attractive, intelligent girls from pursuing what they want to.

Yours faithfully,
CHARLOTTE SCULL,

Rotherhithe, London.

The gods delusion

Sir,

Re: Gods Behaving Badly.

While it is certainly true that the idea of gods from various mythologies living among modern humans is not new to fiction, to imply that the authors who use it are all cribbing from one another is rather sloppy reasoning. I suspect that all fantasy novels sound much alike to you, and it pains you that several authors choose to make use of this (or any other) premise, thereby resulting in the publication of more fantasy novels than you feel is strictly necessary.

By the way, if any author has a right to be put-out by the promotion of Gods Behaving Badly as the next big thing in fiction, it really should be Tom Holt, who has been writing humorous stories featuring gods and mythological heroes since the late 1980s, including: Expecting Someone Taller (Norse/Wagnerian gods), Who's Afraid of Beowulf, and Ye Gods! (Greek gods). (See http://www.tom-holt.com/)

Yours,
MARIA NG (PE subscriber, bookseller, and fan of both Neil Gaiman and Diana Wynne Jones),

Via email.

Just a min

Sir,

The Gods Descend.

The grand-daddy of them all (wait for a great-grand-daddy) is Thorne Smith's "The Night Life of the Gods", Penguin ca. 1930. Genuinely one non-stop laugh, and a finale shedding new light on the origin of Rodin's "Kiss".

By the way – "Atonement". Many decades ago I read some Victorian biog or diary, in which the word "cunny" was an acceptable term for use by young ladies in non-male company; it would correspond to "min" in current usage. Go back far enough and you'll probably find it in Pepys's time, or earlier, in use in polite society.

Yours geriatrically,
MIKE CAMPBELL JONES,

Penarth, S. Wales.

SOLUTIONS

"ER Washroom Services: Bespoke Washroom Solutions" – *toilets*

"A1 Awnings: Outdoor Solutions Specialists" – *awnings*

"Architectural Glazing Solutions" – *glaziers*

"Vision Visual Solutions Ltd" – *signwriters*

All submitted by readers

Lookalike

Jones

King

Sir,

I wonder if any of your readers have noticed the remarkable similarity between Lance-Corporal Jack Jones of the Walmington-on-Sea Home Guard platoon and Mervyn King of the Bank of England? One is a character famous for his hysterical catchphrase "Don't panic! Don't panic!", his eccentric theories and always being one step behind everyone else, while the other was portrayed by Clive Dunn. Could they be related perhaps?

Yours sincerely,
DAVE FORD,

Bath.

McSubsidies

Sir,

In Eye 1192 you showed characteristically English meanness of spirit in the face of Scottish generosity – undoing much of the hard work our Gordon is doing when he says "Britain" or "British" three times per sentence. It is unfortunate that you missed out two important figures. These are:

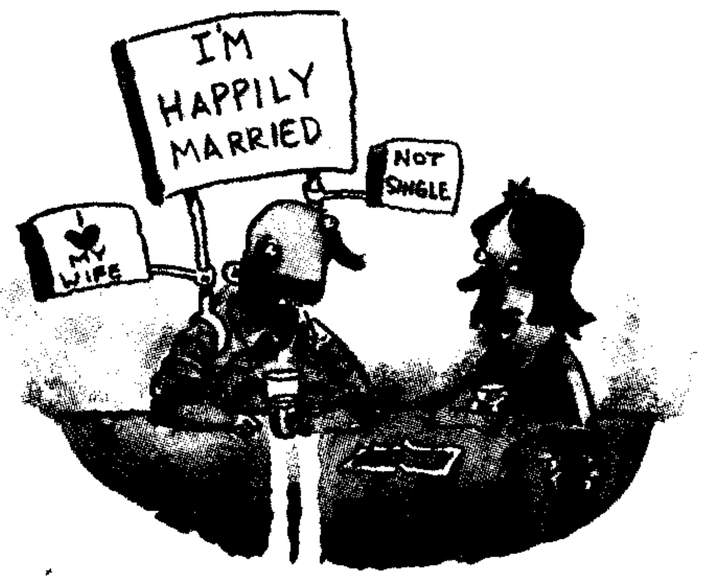
£10.4bn – Money the "Government in London" takes annually from Scotland in oil revenue;

£571.8bn – The debt owed by the "Government in London" in 2006.

Why should we Scots only subsidise England? There are many more deserving cases out there. Please rectify this obviously innocent omission.

Yours faithfully,
J. PAUL HENDERSON,

Via email.



"Sorry, I think you misread the signs"

Stone the Crow

Comrade,

We, the revolutionary council of London would like to issue the following Press Release:

"Brothers and Sisters Enjoy the tube strikes last week? Didn't think so. This guy Bob Crow who runs the unions doesn't like us very much. He seems to love putting the tubes on strike, and in this day and age, we don't know why. So we're going to call his bluff. Instead of him striking, we are. We want to stop using the tube for a day a month so he gets the picture that we control him as much as he controls us. So get some fresh air and get some exercise – it'll do you good!"

Watch this space for the first day of action – www.stonethecrow.org (site under construction, experiencing minor delays between Cockfosters and Finsbury Park).

Join our Facebook group Stone The Crow and lets get this moving. Type in Will Good, Andy Brass or Jakey Gee (the plenary leadership committee – subdivision, Southwark) in Facebook.

Up the Revolution.
ANDREW BRASSINGTON,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

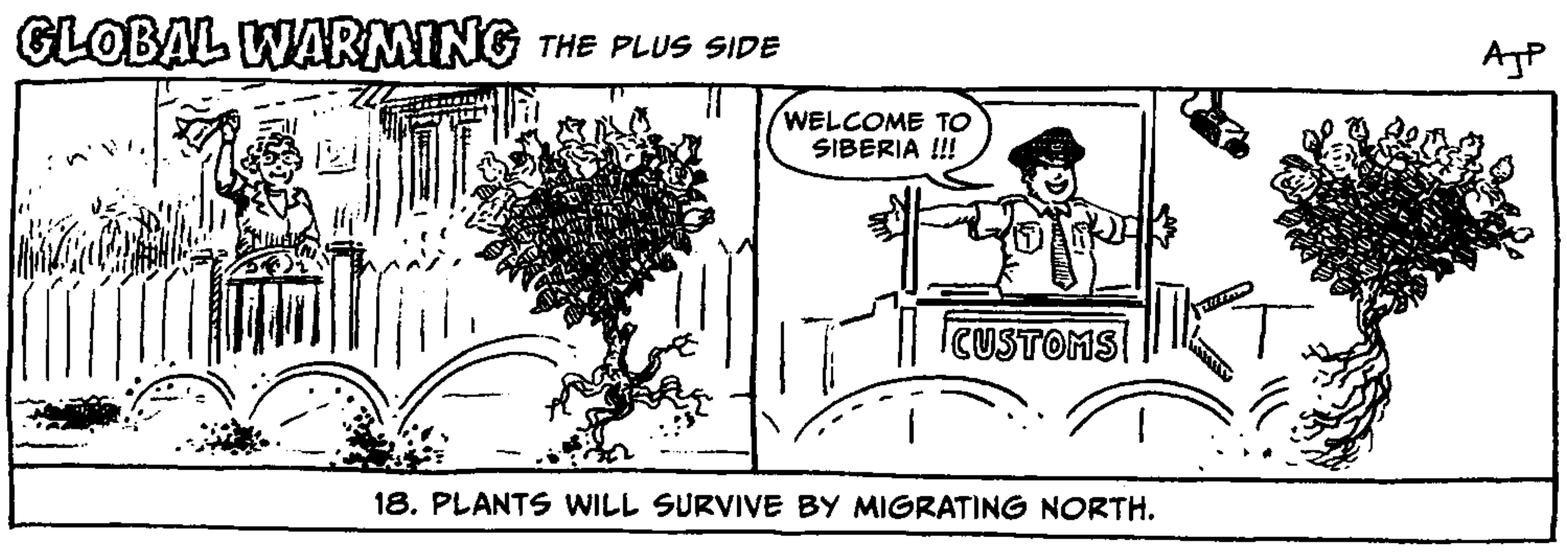
"No bad, but not what you need to do when you're trying to do what you need to do..."
Commentator, NBC (US)
(Michael Downey)

"And Tottenham are fighting like beavers..."
CHRIS KAMARA, Sky Sports
(Liz Opalka)

"He [David Healy] is a big fish in a small fry."
NEIL WARNOCK, Radio 5 Live
(Andrew Close)

"They are a hard nut to break down."
RAY CLEMENCE, Radio 5 Live
(Derrick Scholey)

"You can only play against the opposition you play against."
GRAHAM TAYLOR, Radio 5 Live
(Ross Wagman)



Notes & Queries

Sir,

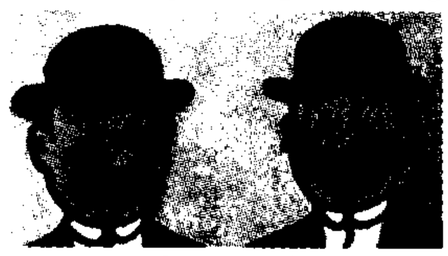
Your correspondent Boleslaw Usarzewski (Letters, Eye 1193) will be pleased to know that there is a Polish language version of Scrabble widely available in Poland. It is probably available through the online shops Empik.pl or Merlin.pl, or failing that his local Polish shop might be able to get it for him for a consideration. I have played the Polish version once or twice – not very successfully I might add – and the accented Z's are a nightmare rather than a remedy for insomnia. Polish is a challenging language, but I wish there were more vowels.

Regards,
LYN ATTERBURY,

Szydlowo,Poland.

Sir,

Billions of blue blistering barnacles! In reference to Alexander Keith's email (1192) Thomson and Thompson first appeared in Tintin in the Congo, Hergé's homage to Belgian colonialism, not Cigars of the Pharoah.



In terms of identifying which is which, it is a tricky business. To be precise: Thomson has a "pointy" moustache, while Thompson has a "droopy" moustache. I attach a photograph as proof. Now, please tell me, are they in any way related?

STEVE KEYS,

Sydney, Australia.

Sir,

Excellent article on the history of Erddig and the machinations of the National Trust but nil points for geographical knowledge.

Wrexham is not and never has been in Flintshire. For centuries it was in Denbighshire and recently formed part of Clwyd (ghastly name) until the last Welsh local government reorganisation. Wrexham is now a County Borough so is not in any other county at all. In fact it incorporates land that used to be in Flintshire but that is the opposite of being in Flintshire.

I have no intention of cancelling my subscription because I enjoy the Eye so much.

Toodle pip.
NIGEL SCOTT (A PROUD WREXHAMIAN),

London N22.

Sir:

"Lunchtime O'Boulez", in his or her obituary notice of Luciano Pavarotti, refers to the great tenor's misbehaviour at the 90th birthday of Gian Carlo Menotti. In passing, he mistakenly calls the late Mr Menotti an "Italian composer". True, he was born in Italy, but he moved to America as a teenager, received his main musical education in Philadelphia, and spent most of his long creative career in that country. He was an American citizen, and his principal popularity as a composer of opera came there. He was the long-time partner of Samuel Barber, very much his equal as a mid-20th century composer. In his later life, he founded and ran musical festivals in Spoleto, Italy and Charleston, South Carolina – and eventually, after his break-up with Barber, he retired to Scotland.

HENNING SIEVERTS

London W13.

In April 2005 he made headlines with his son by baking a 12lb pork pie as a gift to Prince Charles and Camilla Parker-Bowels on their wedding day.

Chronicle & Echo

Letter from **Canberra**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE "Man of Steel", as George W Bush calls our prime minister John Howard, suffered a bad case of the jitters recently. But at least he's thrown off his other nickname: that of the Gollum, the creepy creature who refused to give up the ring of power.

Howard has agreed that "well into" his next term (if he wins the election due before the end of the year), he will retire. At 68 he's a lot older than your Tony Blair was when he finally decided it was time to go, but Howard wants to equal the record of his hero, Robert Menzies, who won five elections.

Soon after the opposition Labor Party chose Kevin Rudd to replace the three-time loser Kim Beazley late last year, Howards approval ratings began to dive. Despite our booming economy — growing at 4.3 percent on the back of sales of coal, gas and iron ore to China, and unemployment down to the same figure — bang in the middle of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation jamboree, Howard fell 18 points behind Labor and psephologists predicted a bloodbath for the Liberal and National coalition. In addition, surveys said the PM was "mean and tricky" and "out of touch".

For years Howard has claimed the mantle of international statesman, but like Blair he did little more than slavishly track an US president who was going nowhere. Howard helped Bush undermine the UN, the WTO, the Kyoto protocols and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (by flogging uranium to India which hasn't signed the NPT) and, of course, he sent a small contingent of troops to the coalition of the willing which invaded Iraq. He also failed to realise a close alignment to Dubya would become a negative.

Like Blair with Gordon Brown, Howard's support for his own treasurer and number two, Peter Costello, has been ambivalent. A recent biography claimed that in the 11 years they'd been together on the frontbench, Costello had never been invited to dine with Howard and his family. Like Brown, Costello has found ways to get his own back. He recently pointed out that Australia has enjoyed continuous economic growth since 1991 — when Labor was still in power – and Howard was incensed. The heart of his re-election message is: Labor's poor economic record will ruin us all.

Costello also criticised his prime minister's favourite tactic of buying votes. All year Howard has been wandering our wide brown land with swags of cash, like gifts for non-viable hospitals, surplus-to-requirements woodchip mills and remote aquatic centres, all in seats where his MPs have less than a 5 percent majority.

To help us understand the value of its generosity (with our money), the government has also spent $2bn (£800m) on advertising since 1996. Thinly disguised as "public service information", it boosts unpopular industrial relations reform; reminds us to watch out for terrorists; and is sprinkled with Singapore-style nanny-state nostrums like: "Don't put your money in fruit machines because you might lose."

Not that Costello is a fiscal cleanskin. A "windfall" $20bn (£8.3bn) surplus in this year's budget has been promoted as "prudent"; but those of us struggling with high interest rates resent being told that we've never had it so good.

A day after the really bad poll a majority of the cabinet suggested Howard should go. His response was that he knew what was best and would carry on. His justification for our continuing presence in Iraq has always been that Australians never "cut and run" so how could he? Sure enough the most recent poll suggests the worst is over. He's still 10 points behind Labor (and could lose his own seat) but, until the next round of bad figures, his party has to believe he's their only chance of winning.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "In January of this year," prosecutor Kathryn Walker told magistrates in Dewsbury, "Kirklees Council began receiving complaints from the public about excrement being deposited overnight on the pavement in Snelsins Road. CCTV was put in place in May, and soon captured images of a motorist stopping his car, dropping his trousers, and defecating in the same place on the street each night, between between 3:40 and 4:00 in the morning. Eventually, somebody surprised the man in the act and noted down his car registration plate, and police were then able to arrest Gary Hurrell on charges of causing a public nuisance."

After Hurrell, 49, had pleaded guilty, Kaleeq Zaman spoke in mitigation. "Clearly he has a problem. He knows it is a sickening offence, and accepts that what he has done is disgusting,

but he suffers from a medical problem. He is regularly 'caught short' on his way to work in Brighouse, and had he not done it in the street, he would have done it in his pants. However, he realises that he has been a public nuisance, is thoroughly remorseful, and will in future carry a bucket and a bag with him whenever he drives to work."

After hearing that Hurrell had been given a two-year anti-social behaviour order, Mrs Waterhouse of Snelsins Road said "It was a health hazard. People could easily have stepped in it, although at least he used to put kitchen roll over the excrement after he'd finished. Mostly he'd leave Winnie the Pooh kitchen roll over it, though a few times there was Mickey Mouse on it. Even so, it really was disgusting, and I'm very pleased he's been caught." *(Spenborough Guardian, 10/8/07. Spotter: Vinnie Clark)*

– ● –

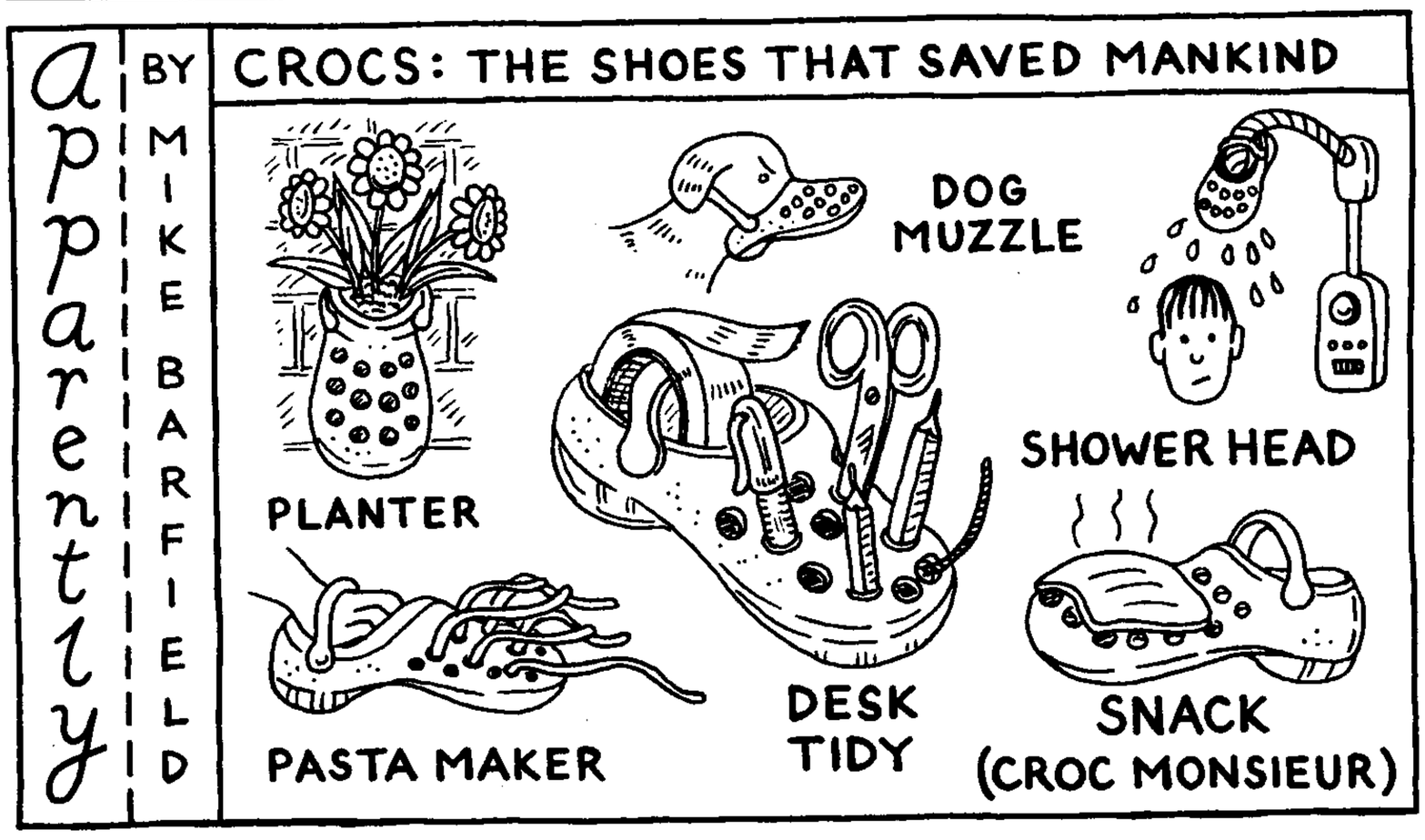
● *"Their usual method of operation is to knock on people's doors, offering flat-screen television sets at a bargain price," Detective Sgt. Jim Walsh told reporters in South Bend, Indiana. "The package is bubble-wrapped in see-through plastic with Wal-Mart labels over it, the metal edges are visible, and it comes complete with cord and controller. It all looks very convincing, and the asking price is only $300, so they sell a lot. But it's just an elaborate job of packaging, and after the sellers have disappeared with the cash, people unwrap their purchase and discover that what they've actually bought isn't a flat-screen television at all. It's an oven door.*

"This is a bizarre fraud, but it does also explain a number of recent burglaries from vacant properties, where the back door was kicked open and only the oven door was stolen. We have now arrested a suspect, but we're continuing to search for at least two other men who may also be disguising oven doors and selling them. Residents are advised only to buy products from reputable stores, but if you are going to buy something from someone off the street, at least make sure you open it up before handing over the cash." (South Bend Tribune, 4/4/06. Spotter: Nick Burgoyne)

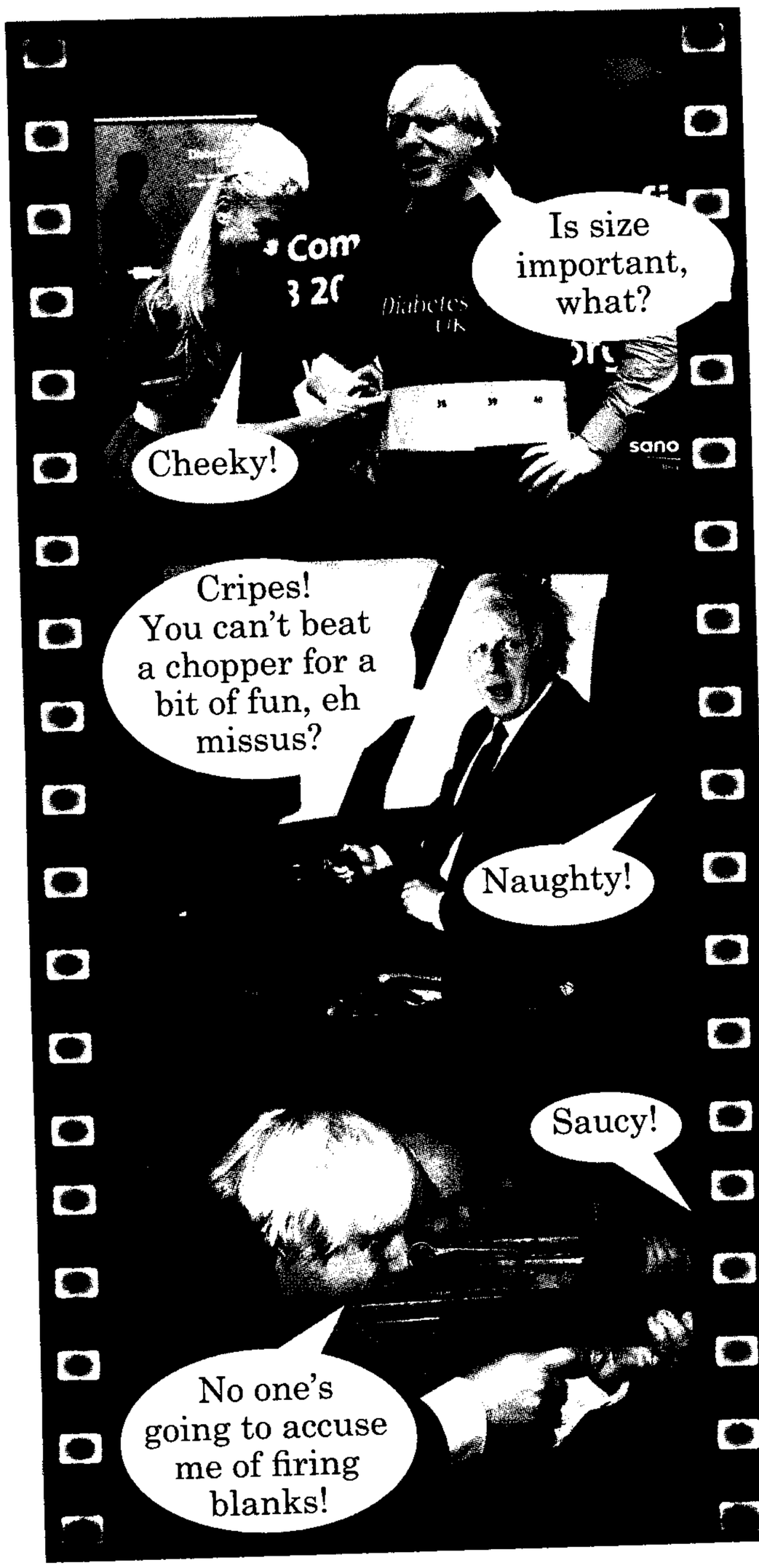
– ● –

● "As commercialisation and the internet begin to break down ancient conventions," Li Yuming of the State Language Commission told a press conference in Beijing, "parents are becoming more adventurous in the naming of their children. One couple recently tried to name their baby '@', claiming that the symbol sounds like 'love him' in Mandarin, and that because the whole world uses it to write e-mails, it would echo their love for their child. And back in 2003, another couple tried to name their child 'Saddam SARS', because those were the two most important events taking place at the time of the baby's birth.

"However, only officially approved names can be given to babies, and the government has announced a ban on names that use Arabic numerals, foreign languages, or symbols that do not belong to Chinese minority languages. But we do have a problem, because sixty million Chinese people have names that use obscure ancient characters which computers cannot recognise or reproduce. Even former Premier Zhu Rongji had a rare 'rong' character in his name that could not be reproduced on computer. That used to give newspaper editors no end of headaches." *(RNI Novosti [Russia], 16/8/07. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*



CARRY ON BORIS



IMAGINE

That Alan Yentob Interview In Full

Yentob: Good evening. Tonight I'm going to interview one of the most important figures in Britain today. Sir Alan Botney.

(Shot of Alan Botney nodding earnestly in studio hundreds of miles away)

Yentob: As a senior BBC Executive, Alan, how do you feel about people inserting shots of themselves into interviews to pretend that they were there when they were actually hundreds of miles away?

(Montage of clips showing Botney nodding intelligently as he interviews Mozart, Nietzsche and George Bernard Shaw)

Yentob: Do you think people who do this should be sacked?

(Shot of Botney nodding furiously)

Yentob: I'll take that as "no".

Next week on *Imagine*, a repeat of Alan Yentob not getting fired

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S SPECIAL ONE!!!

■ **JOSÉ M-m-m-m-Mourinho!?!! Don'tchaluvhim?!? Everygal in Great Britain is reaching for her Kleenex to dry her tears. And for why?!? Because the sultry sex bomb from the Land of the Sardine has been given the red card and told "Adios amigo!" by the Stalin of Stamford Bridge – that's Roman Abramovich to you Mister!?!! Will us gals ever forget you a-smoulderin' on the touchline in your Gucci overcoat with your stubbly chin?!? "No way José!" Geddit?! All together now – Boo-hoo-hoo! I've got the Chelsea Blues!?! (Geddit?!)**

■ JOSÉ MOURINHO!?!! Thank Gawd this Portuguese poseur with his silly coat and seedy stubble has been given the boot by the Moscow Maestro (Roman Abramovich stoopid!). I for one won't be reaching for the Kleenex when this overpaid and overrated egomaniac from the Land of the Sardine walks off with his wheelbarrow full of cash!?! Want to know the way, José?! It's the door marked "Exit"!?! Geddit?!!

■ **HATS OFF to Princess Beatrice!?! At last a glamorous Royal to be proud of, strutting her stuff alongside her gorgeous flame-haired mother who makes Rita Hayworth look like Thora Hird!?!! Good on yer, Princess Beautiful!?!! Geddit?!! You light up our lives Your Ma'amship just like your Auntie Diana!??**

■ PRINCESS BEATRICE!?!! What a disgrace!?!! Parading herself up and down the catwalk with her Mum as though she was Kate Moss or her Auntie Diana!?!! It was lucky the catwalk didn't collapse when the two of them came gallumpin' on stage!?!! Take a tip from Auntie Glenda and Bea off with you!?! Geddit!?! And as for your Mum, she can Ferg off as well!?! Geddit!?!

■ *HERE THEY ARE – Glenda's September Sexpots!?!!*

● **Robert Mugabe.** OK, Gordon won't meet you but you can "get into bed" with me anytime!?!!

● **Brian Paddick** – The Lib Dems' hunky gay ex-copper who wants to be London's next Mayor!?! Don't worry – I'll soon straighten you out, Big Boy!?!

● **The Terracotta Army** – OK, so you're all incredibly old but that's how I like 'em?!!

Byeeee!!!

That Honorary Fellowship Citation In Full

SALUTAMUS CAMILLAM PARKUM-BOWLUM NUNC DUCHESSA CORNWELLIAM CELEBRATA ADULTERA PER MULTOS ANNOS CUM CAROLUS PRINCIPUS GALLORUM REX FUTURUS ET FABRICATOR BISCUTUS ORGANICUS ET CETERA ET CETERA QUONDAM FAMOSSISIMA PER CONVERSATIONUM TELEPHONICUM TAMPAXA COMPARISONE SCANDALUM MAGNATUM ET HOSTILITATE IMPLACABILIS DIANA 'PRINCIPESSA CORDIUM' QUIS DICET AD MARTINO BASHIRO 'SUNT TRES PERSONA IN HOC NUPTIALIS' SED NUNC REHABILITUS PER POPULO BRITANNICO RECOGNITA QUA JOLLIA BONA SPORTICA CUM WELLINGTONIS VERMIS ET SKIRTUS TWEEDUS EX OXFAMA ET CIGARETIS CAPSTANIS FORTIS MAXIMUS (NON TIPPUS) SALUTAMUS ET GAUDEAMUS!

© KINGSIZE COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF ROTHMAN'S, LONDON

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 5

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

I write to you on the eve of the historic XCIVth Party Congress in Brighton, where we shall gather to celebrate the launching of a new Ten-Year Plan to further build the essential framework of the Age of Change.

It must now be admitted that in the past ten years our Congresses have been turned into mere show rallies staged to promote the cult of personality attaching to the disgraced former leader Comrade Blair.

Delegates were humiliatingly forced to participate in stage-managed "standing ovations", many lasting as long as 10 minutes, while the former leader wallowed in the false adulation of the ranks of unwilling workers' delegates.

We remember the procession of lickspittle acolytes trooping up to declare their undying allegiance to the principles of Blairite-Third Way-Cronyism.

All true debate was ruthlessly suppressed. Any hint of dissent among the delegates was savagely crushed, as in the notorious case of Comrade Wolfgang who publicly dared to question the imperialist adventurism of neo-Conservative Busho-Blairism, and was immediately frogmarched from the building at gunpoint by thugs trained by the leader's propaganda henchman, the now discredited drunken psychopath Alastair Campbell.

This year, in the Age of Change, such infamous scenes have been consigned to the dustbin of history. This year, delegates will be free to speak freely and openly on any issue they choose under my new policy of "Partnership in Power".

Hundreds of motions have been submitted and, unfortunately, there will not be time to include them all in our agenda.

However, a wide-ranging selection has been made by an independent panel of Party analysts, headed by Comrade Balls, and the motions chosen are as follows:

1. Motion submitted by UNANIMUS (formerly the Union of Steamrollers, Tractormakers and Allied Trades): *"To congratulate Comrade Brown on becoming Supreme Leader and to wish him success in the Age of Change".*

2. Motion from the Nuneaton and Tunbridge Wells Labour Party: *"To congratulate the Supreme Leader on his superb handling of the current crisis in capitalism created by the reckless greed and stupidity of the boss class (except those who are friends of the Leader)".*

3. Motion from INSPIRE (formerly the Amalgamated Union of Penpushers, Paperclip Co-ordinators and Biro Refill Operatives): *"To congratulate the Supreme Leader on his speedy and successful person management of the government's response to the foot and mouth outbreak created by saboteurs of the capitalist agri-pharma-industrial complex (ie, Merial)".*

4. Motion from the Single Parents Against The War Women's Collective (Tufnell Park): *"To congratulate the Supreme Leader in his long-standing opposition to the imperialist aggression launched against the people of Iraq by the war criminal Bush and his running poodle Blair".*

Not only will all these excellent motions be fully debated, they will all be carried unanimously.

That is the difference between my new Age of Change and the bad old days of monolithic Blairite conformity.

Yours fraternally,

Gordon Brown

The Supreme Leader

PS. There will be no excessive 24-hour drinking at the Congress, in contrast to the decadent practices of Laissez-Faire-Blairite-Alcoholism propagated by the previous unpopular regime.

DECLARATION IN RESPECT OF THE FORMER LEADER'S WIFE MADAME BLAIR

Reports have been circulating that the renegade wife of the discredited former leader is planning to write a book attempting to discredit the Supreme Leader. This is an act of unparalleled treachery.

Madame Blair intends to distort history by claiming that all the follies and failures of the Blair era could be attributed to the deliberate sabotage and deviationism of Comrade Brown in the years when he was forced to collaborate with Blair in a desperate attempt to serve the people by curbing the wilder excesses of Blairite-Third Way-Mandelsonian-Campbellism.

Nothing *could* be further from the objective truth. Madame Blair is well aware that without the superior intellect and financial mastery of Comrade Brown, Blair would have left Britian in chaos, with pensions worthless, the state's finances crumbling and banks collapsing, whilst desperate citizens queued round the block in the hope of rescuing their meagre savings in scenes reminiscent of the Weimar Republic.

Madame Blair is well known to be a frivolous and money-grubbing crypto-decadent whose reckless personal spending has led her into associating with the criminal classes, indulging in speculative property ventures and now openly prostituting herself in the international publishing market place.

Madame Blair is therefore hereby declared a non-person and anyone caught reading her farrago of malevolent and treacherous lies will be frog-marched out of whatever building they are in by one of our new Brownshirt security team.

A REVISED HISTORY OF BRITAIN

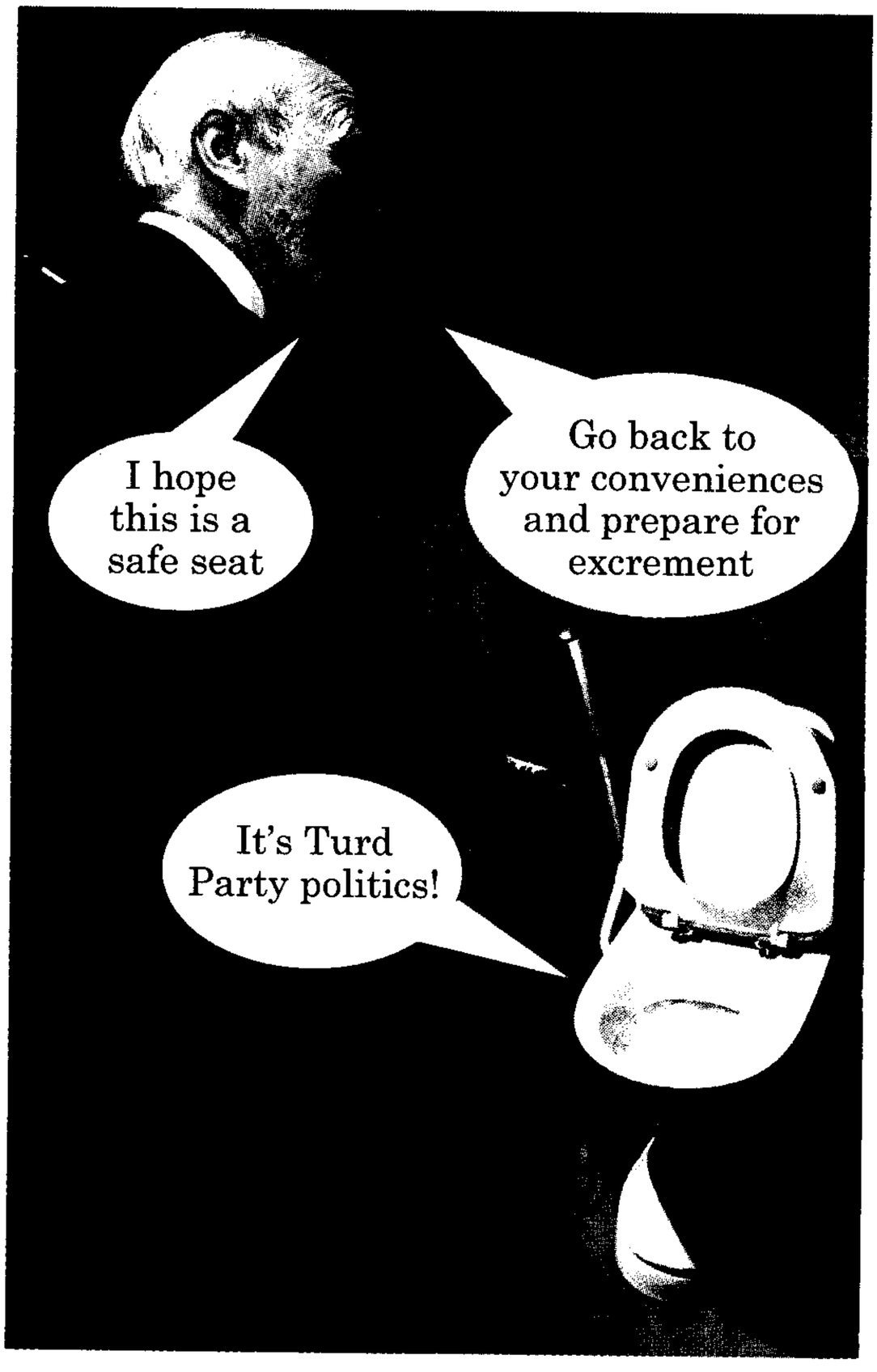
Part 1984: The Thatcher Years

In 1979 the country was rescued from the chaos of Callaghanite-Footite-Trotskyism by Comrade Thatcher, who initiated many much-needed reforms, including the suppression of the workers and the expansion of the capitalist free market. In this respect, she laid the foundations for the later Age of Change, which was to be brought to its full fruition by another strong, visionary, conviction politician who will become known to history as "the Iron Leader".

©1984, Winston Smith, Official Historian, Ministry of Truth

GRAND AUTUMN TOILET HUMOUR QUIZ

● Can you do worse than Private Eye's top schoolboys? We're offering a year's free subscription for the worst alternative entry. *(Second prize: 2 years' free subscription.)*



"She's off on a gap year, she's going to be looked after by volunteers in South America"

What I like about Autumn

by the distinguished commentator **Simon Hefferlump** of the Daily Telegraph

As the leaves on the trees turn to gold and the mists of mellow fruitfulness rise up on every side, our thoughts turn inexorably to the disastrous leadership of the Conservative Party by David Cameron. Poor "Call Me Dave". What a pathetic figure he cuts, with his ridiculous views on melting glaciers and hugging hoodies. And he is made to look even more of a spoiled and stupid sub-intellectual brat by surrounding himself with dolts and morons like the fatuous Osborne and the barking mad Zac Goldsmith. Honestly, why doesn't this dismal lunatic do the decent thing by jumping out of the window and handing over the job of running the Tory Party to someone like Mrs Thatcher?

● Download 'The Hefferlump Vodcast' from telegraph.tv.co.uk or, if you feel you've read this piece too often, switch to another newspaper.

Yesterday On The Web

"Blunkett's bobbies are a bloody disgrace standing by whilst a toddler drowns mind you the parents have got a lot to answer for letting the kids play near water honestly I don't believe for a minute that the McCanns did it but you have to ask yourself how much Abramovich has got to do with Jose walking out I mean they did lose but I think the policeman who said that they weren't trained properly had a point still what kind of country are we living in when a couple of cardboard coppers will stand by and let a toddler drown it's Health and Safety gone politically mad no I blame Northern Rock myself it's just like the Wall Street Crash and all those so-called policeman just stood there doing nothing while Man United went 2-0 up everyone could see it wasn't a red card"

Extract from Peter Drone, on his blogstandard website www.drone.net

BLONDE WOMAN MARRIES SOMEONE ELSE SHOCK

by Our Entertainment Staff **Dee List** and **Hugh Cares**

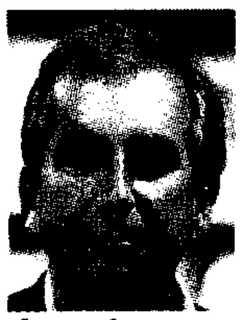
THE world of showbiz was stunned last night by the announcement that a blonde woman was going to marry someone else.

Someone Else, 43, is the latest in a long line of people who have married the blonde woman and other husbands include the first one and that other bloke, although she has also enjoyed high-profile relationships with Thingummy, The Boring One With Glasses and Whatshisname-whowasonthat-programme.

Says the blonde woman, "Someone Else is completely different from all the others. At last I have met Mr Rightwho'snext. This time, I promise, it's for never".

AUTHOR DENIES BLAIR PARALLEL

by Our Literary Staff **Phil Shelves**



BEST-SELLING author Robert Harris today denied that his new novel *Bastard!* was in any way based on the former prime minister Tony Blair.

The plot of Mr Harris's book centres on a former prime minister Toby Chair, who is forced to resign after leading Britain into a disastrous Middle East war, involving the invasion of a fictitious country called Iraq.

The book's villain, Toby, has a thoroughly unpleasant wife, Cheryl Chair, who is a successful human rights lawyer working for a fictitious firm of lawyers called Matrix Chambers in the fictitious City of London.

Insiders who have read the book have been quick to point out the similarities between one of the story's leading characters, the prime minister's gatekeeper Angelica Bunker, described as "svelte, seductive, 45 and previously at school with Toby Chair" and Mr Blair's one-time aide Peter Mandelson *(surely "Anji Hunter"? Ed.)*

Harris In Wonderland

Harris, however, is adamant that there is no connection between any of his characters and members of the previous government.

"I have never heard of Tony Blair," he said, "not to mention his wife. A writer works from his imagination and I began writing my book looking at nothing more than a blank piece of cheque *(surely "paper"? Ed.)*.

"Sorry, it's mine"

Are Independent schools pricing themselves out of the market?

by Our Education Correspondent **Conrad Blackboard**

A NEW report expresses the fear that Britain's private schools could be put out of business by soaring, above-inflation fees which now average more than £50,000 a year per pupil.

But last night one of Britain's top headmasters Mr R G J Kipling, of the prestigious Midlands public school St Cakes (motto 'Quis paget entrat'), hit back at critics of the sector's supposedly excessive fee-structure.

"Schools like St Cakes" said Mr Kipling, "have to attract the very best quality teachers, and provide world-class facilities."

"This costs money" the Head said last night from his luxury yacht Academia V, at its mooring in Grand Cayman harbour.

"The parents of our children want nothing but the best, as do I."

"I am proud to say" he concluded, "that St Cakes is now top of the fees league table, with our new termly charges averaging £500,000."

"This means the school now attracts a wide range of Russian oligarchs, Saudi arms dealers and top Chinese Communist party officials."

Full story and league tables pp.16-18.

WHERE WAS LADY JANE?

The question all London is asking

by Phil Diaries

A NOTABLE absentee at yesterday's society funeral for top nightclub owner Mark Birlington-Arcade was Lady Jane Templeton-Massingberd the 25-year old step-cousin of Birlington-Arcade's second wife, Lady Arabella Vane-Trumpington-Birlington-Arcade, later the wife of Marmite-to-Referendum Party magnate, Sir James Fishpaste, a friend of the multi-millionaire Greek playboy and Spectator columnist Taki Takalotofcokupthenos, who has entered the long-running feud between members of the Birlington-Arcade family which threatens to lead to a multi-million pound court case over Birlington-Arcade's will, which could possibly force the sale of legendary West End nightery Twytte's in Berkeley Square, whose members over the years have included Frank Sinatra, Princess Margaret, the Aga Khan, Lord Lucan, Shergar *(cont. p. 94)*

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS

LISTEN UP CHAPS ! GOOD OLD ZAK HAS GOT SOME SPIFFING IDEAS ABOUT PLANES AND CARS AND STUFF ! !
I'M PRO-ZAK ZZZ
WE'RE GOING TO PUT A BIG TAX ON USING THEM ALL !
ER... SO IN THE FUTURE WHERE EXACTLY ARE WE GOING TO GO ?
DOWN IN THE POLLS OF COURSE !
LET'S GIVE HIM SOME "GLOBAL WARMING" EH READERS ?
TOAST !
SIZZLE ! !
YAROO !

That Quality of Life Tory Report in Full

What you're not going to read

by John Selwyn Gumdrop and Zac Fishpaste

"Money doesn't buy you happiness"

Edmund Burke, Tory philosopher

WE in David Cameron's Conservative Party believe that money isn't everything *(Do we? D.C.)* Indeed there's a very good argument which says the less you have, the happier you are, which is why we are going to put a tax on everything. *(I'm not sure about this bit. D.C.)*

THAT way you won't have any money to spend on all the things which destroy the planet, such as big cars, unnecessary holidays, imported grapefruit segments, supermarket trolleys and so forth.

THIS is the only rational way forward for a party facing total extinction within 10 years *(surely 'world facing extinction'? D.C.)*

WE Conservatives have always been opposed to more regulation but sometimes it is necessary. That is why we're proposing much more of it *(continues for 549 pages)*

CHINESE EXHIBITION OPENS

Age-Old Emperor Seen For First Time

by Our Antiquities Staff **Terry Cotter**

THE 2,000-year-old Lib Dem Ming, known as "The Worst Emperor" today went on show in a conference hall in Brighton.

But members of the public who had been eagerly anticipating the sight of his legendary army of terracotta liberals were disappointed.

Said one, "We expected thousands of these figures, but when we got there, there were only 17 of them."

"We were told they were too fragile to travel, and frankly the hall looked a bit empty."

However the curator of the exhibition explained, "These 17 clay figurines, each dressed in a suit from Marks & Spencer and carrying placards demanding higher taxes on aeroplanes, 4x4s and anyone earning more than they do are an extraordinary glimpse of a vanished world."

HISTORY IN BRIEF

The Emperor Ming, known as "Ming The Useless", took power nearly two millennia ago, with the promise that he would unite the warring factions of his new kingdom to create a unified Greater Lib Dem Empire that would be unstoppable.

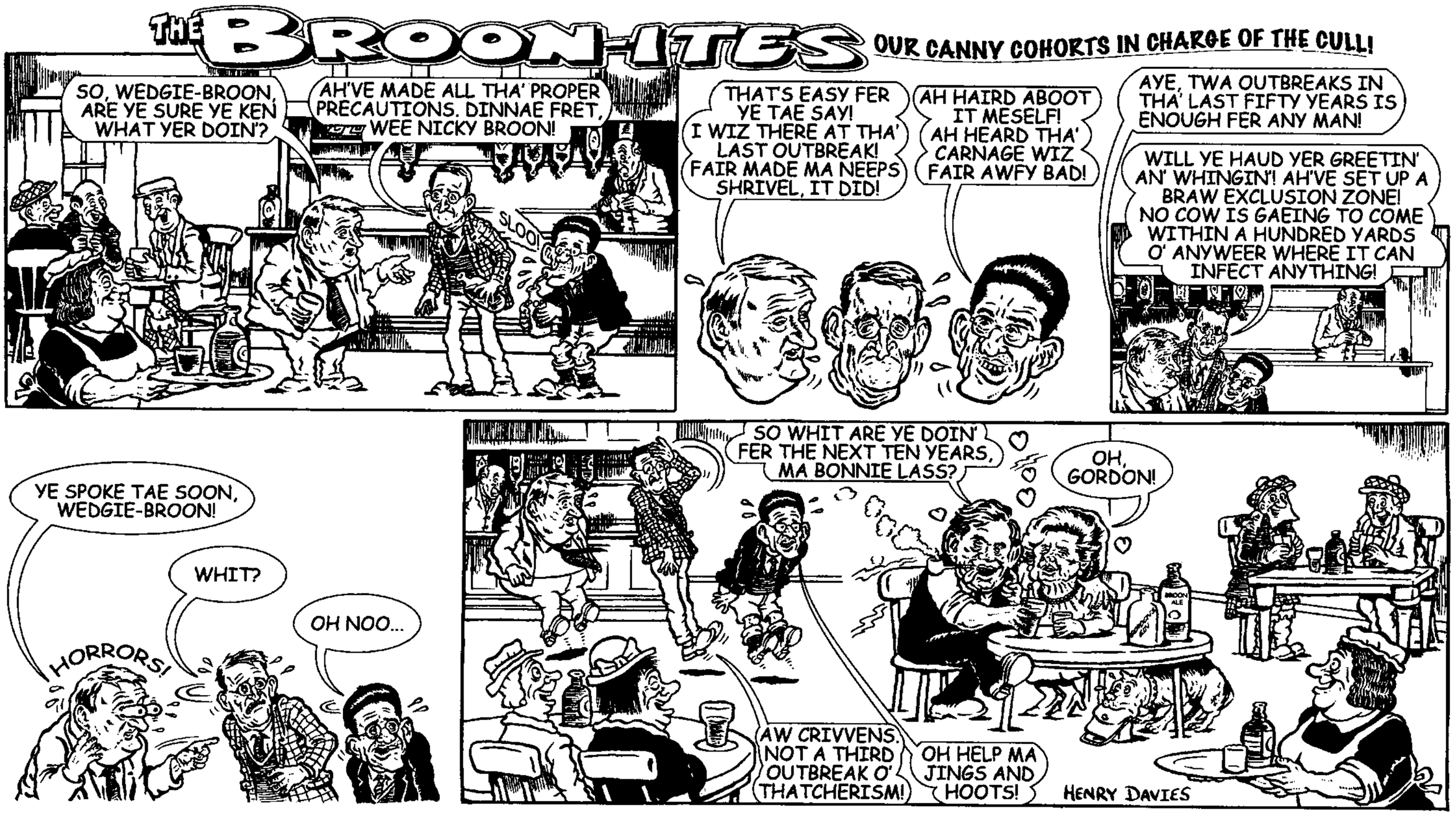
He seized power after the downfall of Cha Lee, the popular but drunk emperor who had reigned since he was a boy, but in later life had become dangerously dependent on rice whisky.

To begin with, the old-world Ming, with his courtly ways and reassuring manner, seemed to restore confidence in his millions of subjects. But as time passed, the new emperor became increasingly unsure of himself and took to peering down toilet bowls, as if seeking his salvation in another world.

This led to the hatching of innumerable plots among his terracotta generals, who eventually overthrew Ming and brought his short, unhappy reign to a premature end.

Where You Can See The Worst Emperor

- **House of Commons**, 12am Tuesdays only **(Admission free)**
- **National Liberal Club**, all day **(Members only)**


THE BROON-ITES
OUR CANNY COHORTS IN CHARGE OF THE CULL!
SO, WEDGIE-BROON, ARE YE SURE YE KEN WHAT YER DOIN'?
AH'VE MADE ALL THA' PROPER PRECAUTIONS. DINNAE FRET, WEE NICKY BROON!
SLOO!
THAT'S EASY FER YE TAE SAY! I WIZ THERE AT THA' LAST OUTBREAK! FAIR MADE MA NEEPS SHRIVEL, IT DID!
AH HAIRD ABOOT IT MESELF! AH HEARD THA' CARNAGE WIZ FAIR AWFY BAD!
AYE, TWA OUTBREAKS IN THA' LAST FIFTY YEARS IS ENOUGH FER ANY MAN!
WILL YE HAUD YER GREETIN' AN' WHINGIN'! AH'VE SET UP A BRAW EXCLUSION ZONE! NO COW IS GAEING TO COME WITHIN A HUNDRED YARDS O' ANYWEER WHERE IT CAN INFECT ANYTHING!
YE SPOKE TAE SOON, WEDGIE-BROON!
WHIT?
OH NOO...
HORRORS!
SO WHIT ARE YE DOIN' FER THE NEXT TEN YEARS, MA BONNIE LASS?
OH, GORDON!
AW CRIVVENS. NOT A THIRD OUTBREAK O' THATCHERISM!
OH HELP MA JINGS AND HOOTS!
HENRY DAVIES

'DON'T PANIC!'

Shouts Northern Rock Man

by Our Financial Staff Fred Needle-Street

THE beleaguered figure at the centre of the current financial crisis yesterday urged the public not to panic.

"There is no need for people *to lose* confidence in the current government," screamed the Chancellor, Alastair Darling.

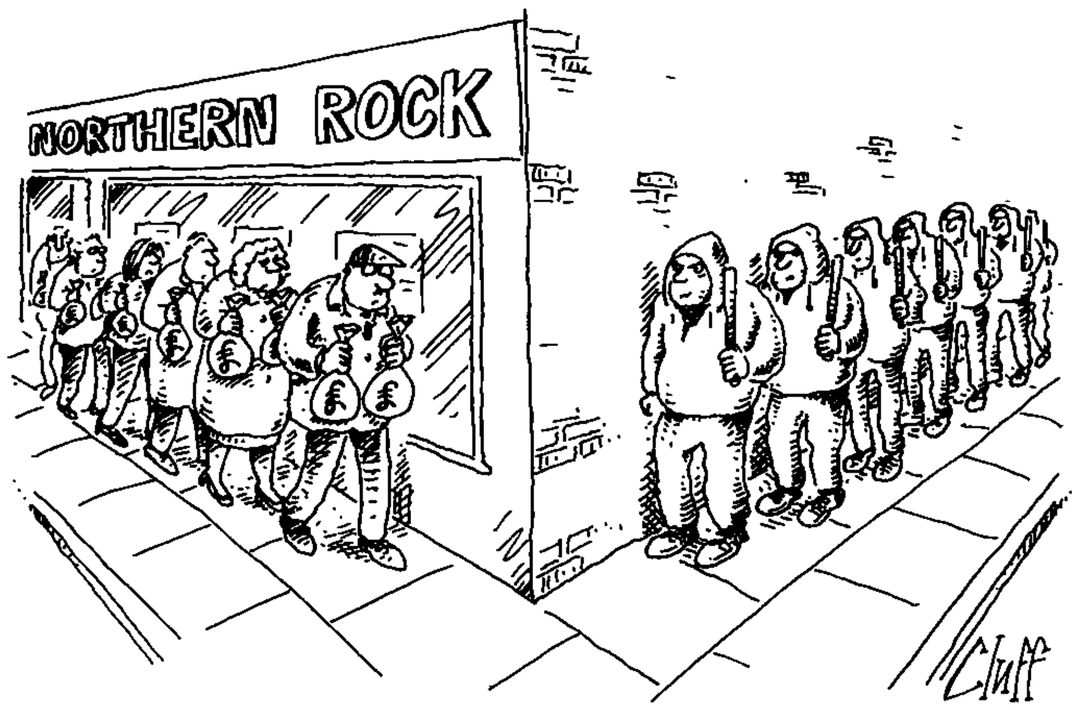
Nobody's Darling

As long queues formed in British high streets with people demanding that he resign, Darling tried desperately to quell the mounting hysteria.

"There is nothing to worry about. This government is safe as houses... Well, obviously, safer than that."

"I will take whatever measures necessary to prevent the collapse of the Government – even if it means using public money to support an administration that has been reckless with credit – which we have."

He yelled, "I urge the British public to be sensible. Don't withdraw your votes and don't give them to a dodgy outfit like the Conservative Party instead."



NORTHERN ROCK LATEST

by Our Banking Correspondent **Phil Boots**

SAVERS at Northern Rock admitted today they simply can't understand why massive amounts of bonuses continue to be withdrawn from the bank by its senior executives.

"It's completely irrational that these senior executives have been queuing round the block to withdraw millions of pounds in bonuses," said a bemused Northern Rock spokesman. "It's especially baffling, as these are the same people who have driven the bank to the point of bankruptcy."

However, these calls for restraint did little to stem the tide of panicky senior executives eager to fill their boots before they're taken over.

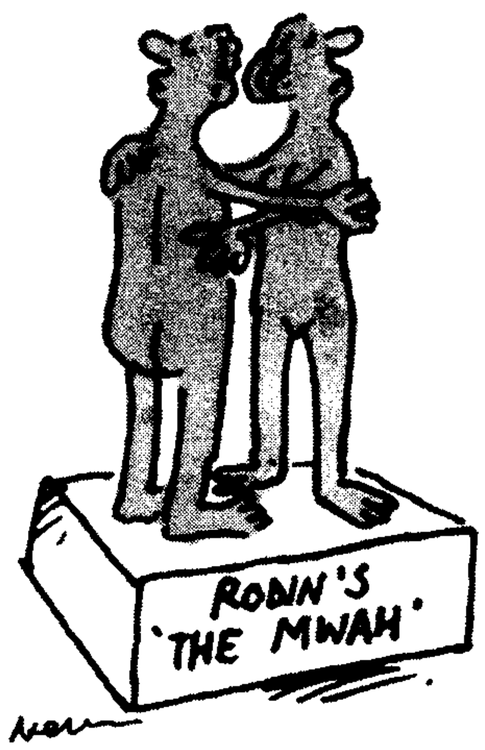
The 5-second Interview

Marco-Gordon Novelli, television personality & chef

In a nutshell, my philosophy is...

Live for the...

(Sorry, that's all we have time for. Next week: Paris Britney Lohan)



"This shoe is killing me!"

Advertisement

In times of growing financial uncertainty we're all looking for a safe refuge for our savings

That's why there's no better time than now to consider putting your money UNDER THE BED*

£

With instant access twenty-four hours a day, and no access via the internet, it's no wonder that more and more savers are opting to place their savings UNDER THE BED

£

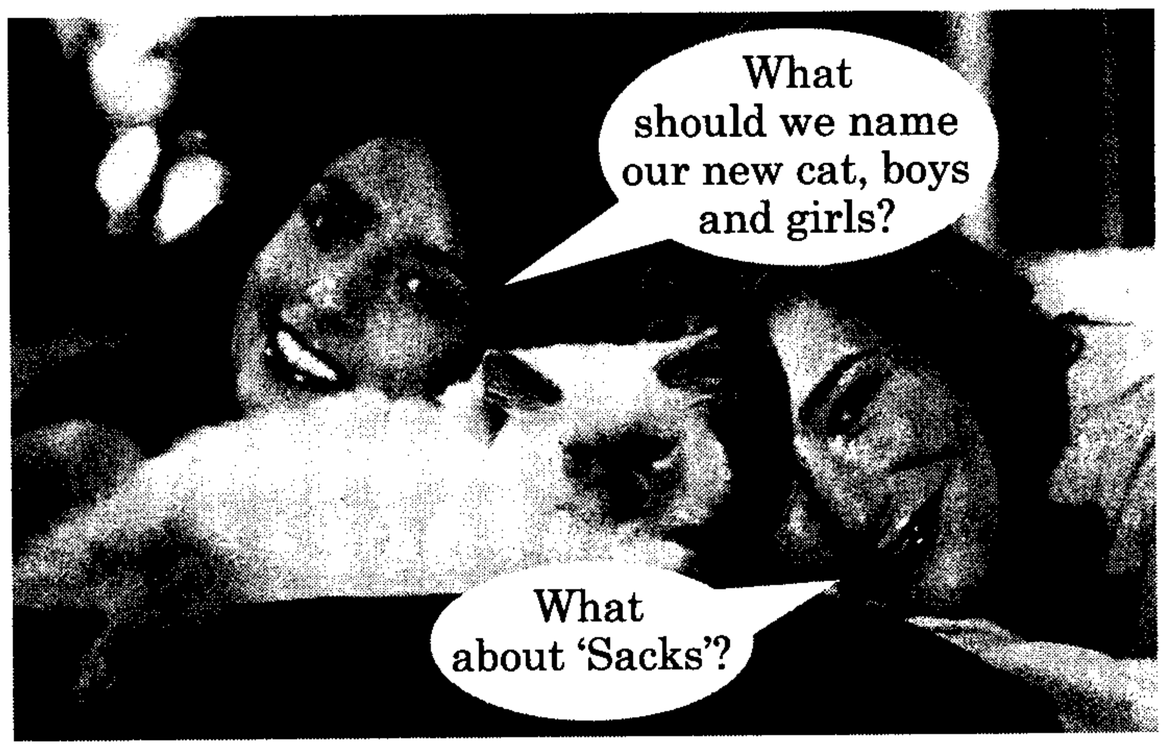
With an introductory offer of 0% interest on all balances, and no loan book filled with dodgy sub-prime mortgage loans you'd be mad to consider putting your savings anywhere else.

£

Join generations of savers who have enjoyed the benefits of leaving their savings UNDER THE BED

* Savings placed 'Under The Bed' are not regulated under the financial services compensation scheme, pillows can go down as well as feathers and synthetic man-made fibres.

BLUE PETER CRISIS LATEST



TV Highlights

Michael Palin's 'The New Series'

PALIN sets off on an epic journey, starting on BBC1 and ending up as a free DVD on the cover of the Times. On the way he travels through a variety of weird and wonderful locations, including BBC2, The Discovery Channel, UK Living, UK TV Gold and British Airways Inflight Entertainment (outbound only).

Join Palin for this entertaining voyage round the airwaves where he travels in the footsteps of himself as he goes round some other places.

You Can't Fire Me – I'm Famous

BBC1 **10.30pm**

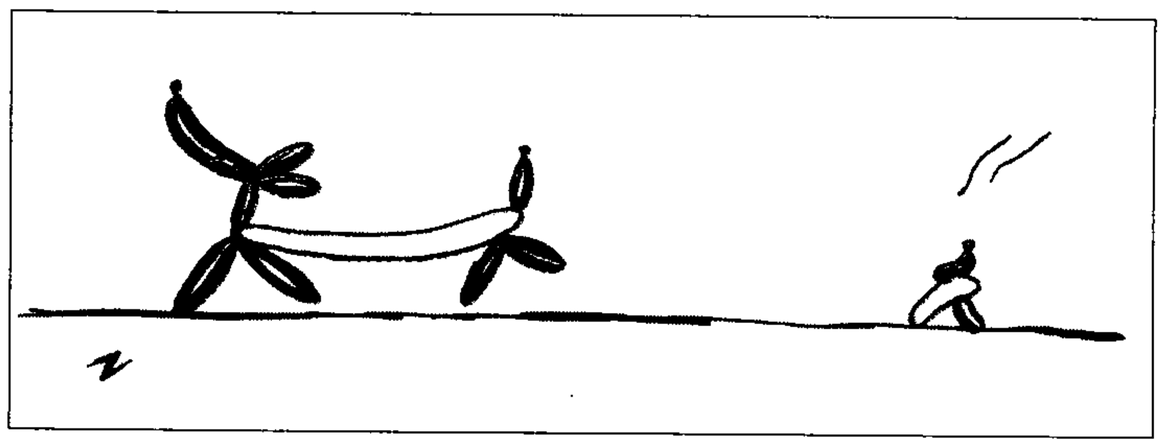
DIRECTOR General Mark Thompson reveals that he's not going to be among the fifty or so lowly BBC staff members sacked over the numerous faked phone-in scandals.

THE McCANNS
An Apology

IN RECENT days, in common with all other newspapers, we may have given the impression that the McCanns might in some way have been connected with the disappearance of their daughter Madeleine. Headlines such as *"Police Now Certain That Parents Killed Maddie"*, *"Did They Dump Her In The Sea?"* and *"They Always Looked A Shifty Pair To Us"* may have suggested that we believed that the McCann's were about to be arrested, charged with murder and sent to prison for ever.

We now realise that there was not a jot nor scintilla of truth in these appalling slurs and mendacious smears against two tragically grieving parents who for four months have been trapped in a nightmare of despair. Headlines such as *"Leave Maddy's Parents Alone, For God's Sake"*, *"Clouseau Cops Should Face Gaol, Not Kate and Gerry"* and *"We Always Said That The McCanns Were Innocent"* should leave our readers in no doubt as to our position on this matter.

Tomorrow: Another apology for today's apology.



'THE SPECIAL ONE' HAS GONE
A Nation Mourns

THE world of political football was rocked to its foundations yesterday when the man known as "the special one" departed after a string of bad results and bitter rows with his grumpy money man.

Jose Blairinho was the man who had taken his team to three successive victories, but now he has gone, leaving a void that may never be filled.

(You're fired. Ed.)

But following the shock defeat by the Iraqis, the fans turned on Blairinho and the hardfaced oligarch of the purse strings, Gordon Brownavich, decided that enough was (*No, you really are fired. Ed.*)

Late score

Labour United **32**

Tories Divided **20**

That Abramovich shortlist to take over control from Mourinhio at Chelsea

- **Roman Abramovich**
- **Roman Abramovich**
- **Roman Abramovich**

...er

That's it

In Memoriam Marcel Marceau, Mime Artist

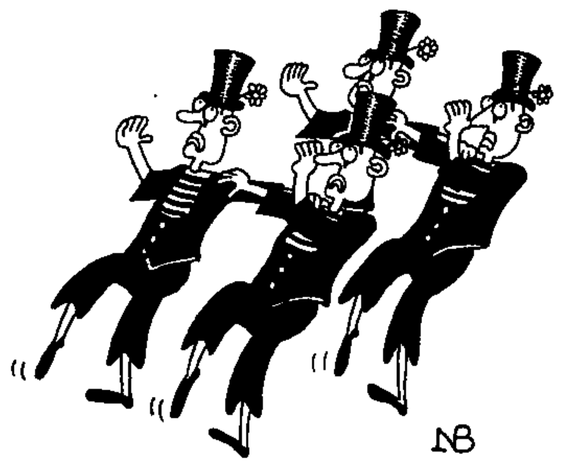
So. Farewell
Then Marcel
Marceau,
Famous French
Mime.

"

"

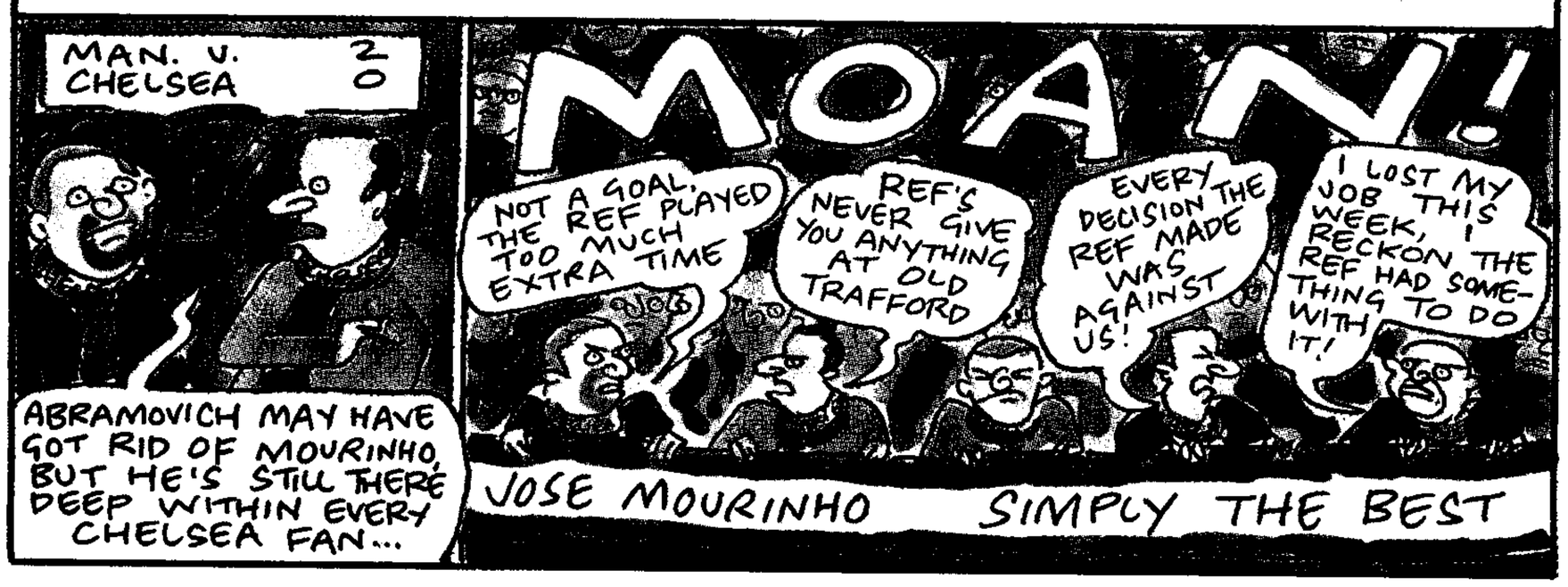
Yes. That
Was Your
Catchphrase.

E.J. Thribb (17½)



ENGLAND CAPTAIN LAP-DANCING CLUB ADMISSION

the PREMIERSH*TS


MAN. U. 2
CHELSEA 0
ABRAMOVICH MAY HAVE GOT RID OF MOURINHO, BUT HE'S STILL THERE DEEP WITHIN EVERY CHELSEA FAN...
MOAN!
NOT A GOAL, THE REF PLAYED TOO MUCH EXTRA TIME
REF'S NEVER GIVE YOU ANYTHING AT OLD TRAFFORD
EVERY DECISION THE REF MADE WAS AGAINST US!
I LOST MY JOB THIS WEEK, I RECKON THE REF HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH IT!
JOSE MOURINHO SIMPLY THE BEST

7.15 Cricket on Five
Mark Nicholas presents highlights of the sixth of seven one-day internationals between England and Italy at the Oval. (S)

Radio Times

DIARY

MICHAEL PARKINSON'S ALL-TIME GREATS

I've met some truly extraordinary figures in my time, that's for sure. Luciano Pavarotti, to take just one shining example. A great giant of a man, and an opera singer of indisputable genius. Yes, he truly was larger than life – in more ways than one, I might add! And what a voice the bloke had. One of the truly legendary voices of this or indeed of any age. They don't make 'em like that any more.

I was privileged to interview Luciano a couple of times, and on both occasions I was struck by the sheer size of the man. And the guy sang like an angel, that nobody can deny. I remember asking him where he'd got that amazing voice of his from. He looked at me and said that that was a first-rate question, but for the life of me I now can't remember what he said after that. The rest, as they say, is history. The world's truly a poorer place without him, no mistake. But there'll certainly be some cracking music in heaven, and that's for sure.

Another of the all-time great vocalists of this or indeed any century was the late, great Perry Como. For me, he had that indefinable thing we know, for want of a better term, as genius. And what a voice the bloke had. One of the truly legendary voices of this or indeed of any age. They don't make 'em like that any more.

I interviewed him a number of times over the years. On all those occasions, I asked him whether it had been hard to cope with all the pressures of fame. I'll never forget what he said next. He told me it'd certainly helped get him the best table in restaurants! Whichever way you look at it, the guy was a true pro, in every sense of the word.

It's all too easy to forget that the late, great Frank Sinatra was first and foremost a superb entertainer. They don't make 'em like that any more. How to sum up such a legendary? He had that unique and indefinable way of delivering a song, and of course his phrasing was truly remarkable. The guy had had that indefinable something – and that's what makes him so frankly indefinable.

I found him an immensely likeable and approachable bloke. I remember once asking him how he'd coped with all the pressures of fame. He paused for a second – and then he told me it'd certainly helped him get the best table in restaurants! Yes, the world's a poorer place without him.

I've a lot of time for the great comics, and too my mind none came greater than the late, great Tommy Cooper. He was the sort of bloke who could make you laugh simply by walking on stage. I don't know what it was, but he had that indefinable something that raises him to legendary status. I once asked him how he coped with the pressure of success. I forget now exactly how he replied – something about tables in restaurants – but he had myself and the studio audience literally creased up. They don't make 'em like that any more.

I have the greatest respect for my so-called rivals, I'm not mentioning any names, that's not my style, but frankly they haven't got the foggiest how to conduct a decent interview.

The Parkinson Show is the last of the classic interview-based chat shows. They don't make 'em like that any more. The rest of them are just comedy shows. Nothing wrong with that, everybody enjoys a chuckle and good luck to them, but with the greatest respect I don't imagine they'll be being talked about years from now. To me, when you're privileged to be sitting opposite a legendary figure, a star of stage and screen, possibly an all-time great, you don't want to be cracking jokes at his expense. No, any interviewer worth his salt wants to know what makes them tick.

"Tell me, Luciano, something that's long intrigued me – what *makes you tick*?"

"Something I've always wanted to know, Frank, and I'm sure many of our viewers feel the same – what is it that *makes you tick*?"

"There are so many questions I want to ask you, Prime Minister, but one above all – what is it exactly that, as it were, *makes you tick*?"

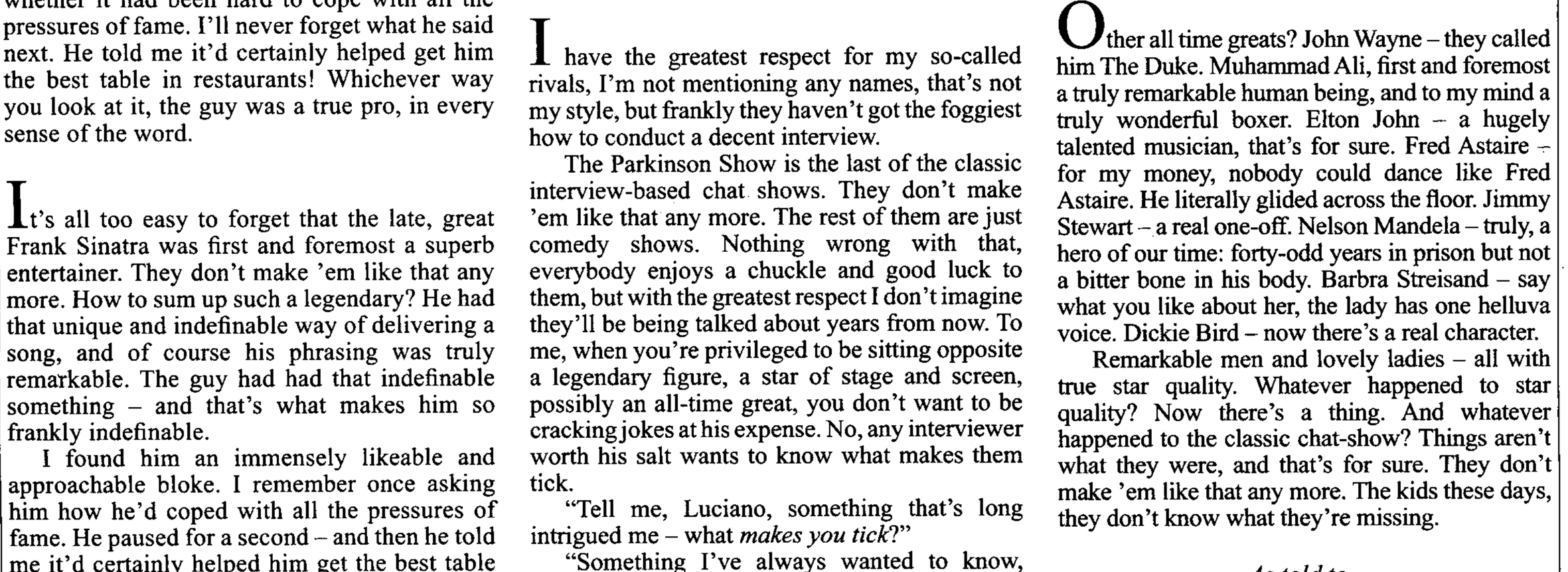
I had the remarkable novelist and veritable wordsmith Graham Greene on the show once with George Best, in my book undoubtedly the greatest footballer of this or any age. It was truly fascinating to hear Graham listing his ten greatest goalies of all time and George discussing the future of the English novel. As I remember, both these giants agreed that at least being famous got you the best table in a restaurant! The music was provided by the ever-lovely Lulu, or was it the legendary Clodagh Rodgers? Magic.

The Beatles were a truly remarkable group of young men. Four lads from Liverpool who conquered the world. Between them, Lennon and McCartney composed to my mind some of the most memorable songs of our time. I had John Lennon on the show once. He could be very outspoken, and was quite a character. I plucked up the courage to ask him the one thing I'd always wanted to know. In this game, timing is everything, so when I felt he was sufficiently relaxed, I slipped in the question. "Tell me, John, something I've always wanted to know" I said, " – what makes you tick?" That took him by surprise! I forget his reply – probably something about music, knowing John – but it was a truly indefinable moment of classic TV, and one that I will long cherish.

Other all time greats? John Wayne – they called him The Duke. Muhammad Ali, first and foremost a truly remarkable human being, and to my mind a truly wonderful boxer. Elton John – a hugely talented musician, that's for sure. Fred Astaire – for my money, nobody could dance like Fred Astaire. He literally glided across the floor. Jimmy Stewart – a real one-off. Nelson Mandela – truly, a hero of our time: forty-odd years in prison but not a bitter bone in his body. Barbra Streisand – say what you like about her, the lady has one helluva voice. Dickie Bird – now there's a real character.

Remarkable men and lovely ladies – all with true star quality. Whatever happened to star quality? Now there's a thing. And whatever happened to the classic chat-show? Things aren't what they were, and that's for sure. They don't make 'em like that any more. The kids these days, they don't know what they're missing.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


JUST BECAUSE I'M A STAR WITH A SO-CALLED CELEBRITY LIFESTYLE DOESN'T MEAN I'M DETACHED FROM REALITY...
OF COURSE I HAVE OPINIONS ABOUT PUBLIC TRANSPORT.
WITH ALL DUE RESPECT, WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT PUBLIC TRANSPORT?
WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT .... BUSES?
DON'T TALK TO ME ABOUT BUSES. I KNOW ALL ABOUT THEM...
A JAPANESE TOURIST BUS STOPS RIGHT OUTSIDE MY HOUSE...

Literary Review

Own goal

The Autobiography: My Manchester United Years

Sir Bobby Charlton

(Headline £20)

THE fiction that soccer heroes write their own autobiographies was long ago exploded. When, something over half a century back, the blond, be-quiffed England captain Billy Wright brought out his genre-defining *Football is My Passport*, his was the solitary name on the title-page: the obliging journo from the *Wolverhampton Star* who had knocked it into shape went unacknowledged.

Now, on the other hand, the role of sporting amanuensis is practically a career option in itself, and the likes of Hunter Davies (Gazza, Wayne, etc) spend most of their working lives, tape-recorder in hand, in bewildered transit between one Premiership footballer's mansion and another.

Sir Bobby Charlton's choice of deferential amanuensis fell on James Lawton, the Abraham Wargs-like chief sports writer of the *Independent*, who fills up many a page at the back end of his organ with laments for the passing of soccer's prelapsarian golden age. To mark the publication of *My Manchester United Years*, the first tranche of a three-volume life and times, vast acreages of space were duly set aside for an absolutely lavish encomium to a man "of blood and passion, but also one who understands how the world, and football, work..." Here, the implication ran, was a kind of talisman from football's glory days, before the financiers and the seven-figure salaries had swept in, where only the glory mattered.

Yes indeed. Sir Bobby's recapitulation of his Manchester career – with the usual cargo of statistics tacked on to the end to bulk it out – represents an interesting reversal of the modern trend in soccer book marketing. Most soccer autobiographies sell themselves on scandal, or what passes for it: how Dirk Golightly clocked the gaffer, shagged the topless model, went mad or drank himself to extinction. Sir Bobby, alas, is old school: diffident, bashful, sincere. Traumatic events in his life – the Munich air disaster, family estrangements – are not an excuse for breast-beating or score-settling but simply traumatic. He was a poor boy from the ground-down north-east: when he remarks of his coal-miner father that "he didn't know much about football, but he did know how a man should tackle life", the result might sound like something out of a Victorian moral primer, but no one could doubt that he means it.

This being an old school memoir, all the judgements – particularly his estimates of the new, footballing plutocracy – are done in an intensely amusing code. David Beckham? "Towards the end of his time at Old Trafford I found it increasingly difficult to pass comment on his situation." Eric Cantona? Well now, Eric's talent was, ah, "quite exceptional in certain areas", while his "spirit and instinct were never less than quirkish" don't you know? No prizes for guessing what Sir Bobby really thought of these mainstays of the late-90s Ferguson army, but this is old-style sportsman's *politesse*, from a world where "respected disciplinarian" means "sadist" and "engaging maverick" "dratted nuisance".

The problem is, though, that setting Charlton up as the incorruptible exemplar of those grand old days of grace, fervour and disdain of the big bucks, just doesn't work. The game was professionalized long before he reached it in the 50s and went big-business in the 60s after the overthrow of the maximum wage. Sir Matt Busby, on whose god-like qualities he constantly dilates, has some claims to be regarded as the prototype of the modern managerial thruster. Worse, as the final chapters of *My Manchester Years* demonstrate in spades, soccer's degeneration into something big, fat, money-driven and morally questionable coincided with his own rise to the upper reaches of the game: a Manchester United director these 20 years and more, a keen advocate of Alex Ferguson's arrival two years later and ready to defend the new American owners on the grounds that "they

knew how big-money sport worked".

Charlton on the arch-thug Roy Keane? Never mind the opponent-maiming and the referee-hounding: "...always there was that commitment which made him such an extraordinary competitor". What remains is the thought of a thoroughly decent man with the misfortune to have been at large in a world where morally decent men have trouble in making their presence felt: a bit like one of those South American dictatorships where the old democratically elected president, kept on for PR reasons, sits sadly in the palace amid the serial garrottings and the clamour from the streets, hoping against hope that everything will turn out for the best.

Books & Bookmen

■ ON a trip to the high court, Lord Gnome notices a newly issued "claim form" (aka writ), numbered HQ07X02981. Richard "Dirty" Desmond, it reveals, is suing author Tom Bower for libel.

How can this be, when Bower's unauthorised biography of Dirty Des, *Rough Trader*, isn't yet published? Desmond, it transpires, is suing over Bower's previous book, his unauthorised life of Conrad Black. Why he has waited 10 months since publication is not explained. More mysterious still is the *casus belli*: a passage that actually shows Dirty Des in a positive light!

In the autumn of 2002, Bower records, Dirty Des heard rumours of a financial crisis at Black's Hollinger company. Desmond was still smarting from his legal defeat by Black two years earlier, in a court dispute over the printing plant jointly owned by the *Express* and *Telegraph* groups. He was only too happy for the *Express* to run a story revealing that Hollinger now faced "its biggest crisis ever" after "a credit facility was cancelled by its bankers".

Black, desperate to conceal the extent of his problems, sued the *Express* for libel. Dirty Des eventually agreed to settle and publish an apology. "Victory against Desmond, a tough operator, vindicated Black's remorseless pursuit of challengers," Bower writes. "Grinding his critics into the dust had never failed." But the point of the story, as anyone reading Bower's book will see, is that for once *Desmond was in the right.*

Why sue, then? Dirty Des objects to what he claims is Bower's implication that he was motivated by a desire for revenge against Black. But this could be a risky line to pursue: if his case depends on arguing that it's defamatory to accuse him of vengefulness, the defence will presumably be entitled to produce evidence of vindictive behaviour – which, as *Eye* readers will know, is copious. (His attacks on Lord Rothermere alone could occupy a whole week of testimony.) The attendant publicity might also postpone yet again that happy day when he enters the House of Lords as Baron Desmond of Filth. His predecessors as *Express* boss – Victor Matthews, David Stevens, Clive Hollick – were all ennobled, and it would be distressing if Des missed out.

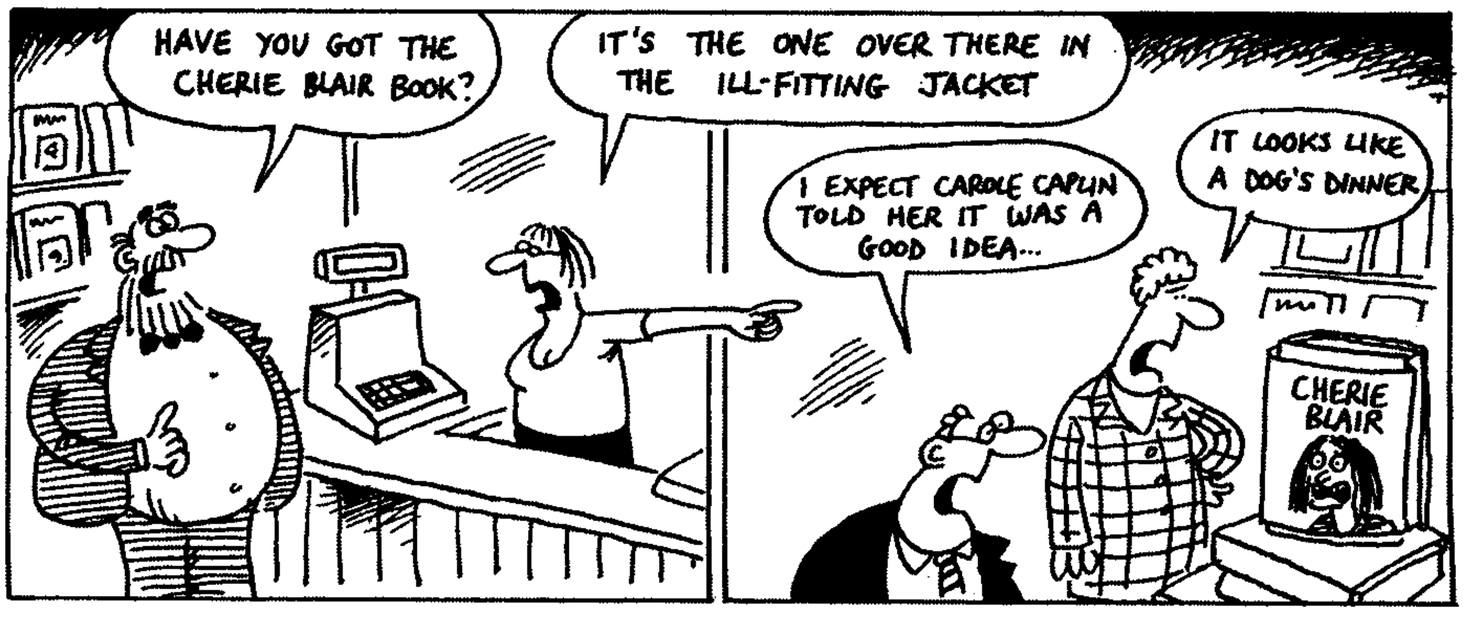
There is another risk, especially as Bower apparently intends to defend the action robustly. A trial featuring Dirty Des under cross-examination in the witness box would receive massive coverage – which in turn would help promote Bower's book about him.

Asked by the *Independent* earlier this year about the delay in publication of *Rough Trader*, Bower said it was because his publishers didn't feel Dirty Des's profile was high enough. "Desmond has disappeared from public view and the publishers think he is unimportant at the moment," he explained. "Nobody knows who he is. He needs to fall off the back of a yacht or something." Or, perhaps, to sue for libel.

■ A 15 percent drop in US sales prompted Bloomsbury to announce last week that it was reducing staff at its American branch "through attrition". Meanwhile staff levels in London have dropped by one – but the departure of marketing director Minna Fry owes less to attrition than to the growing eccentricity of chief exec Nigel Newton.

Earlier in the summer Newton took umbrage when a Bloomsbury security guard – primed to watch out for Harry Potter thieves – had the temerity to check his ID. Newton told Minna Fry to dock the man's pay by £70 for not showing suitable respect, but she lamentably failed to do so. When Newton called Fry in to rebuke her for this oversight, he also suggested she take a different job in the company as paperback publisher.

Fry said that actually she liked her existing job as marketing director, to which Newton retorted: "Don't be so bourgeois!" He then gave her job to Kathleen Farrar and deleted Fry from the list of company directors on Bloomsbury's website the same night. A brief


HAVE YOU GOT THE CHERIE BLAIR BOOK?
IT'S THE ONE OVER THERE IN THE ILL-FITTING JACKET
I EXPECT CAROLE CAPLIN TOLD HER IT WAS A GOOD IDEA...
IT LOOKS LIKE A DOG'S DINNER
CHERIE BLAIR

official announcement said she was leaving the company for "pastures new". These may turn out to be courtrooms as she is preparing to sue for constructive dismissal.

■ GRAHAM LORD's scandalous and thoroughly unauthorised new biography of Joan Collins seemed like a natural for the *Mail on Sunday*. Literary editor Susanna Gross duly commissioned a long piece from her regular showbiz reviewer, Roger Lewis, which was all set to appear last weekend – until senior *MoS* executives found out.

Unbeknown to Gross, they had been trying to woo Collins (who is known to hate Lord's book) into writing occasional columns for the paper. The review was promptly spiked.

Ironically enough, one of the recurring themes in Lord's book is that Joan is prone to prima donna tantrums. To judge by their abject terror, *MoS* executives agree with him.

■ "I HAVEN'T read any of them apart from Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach*," admitted Mariella Frostrup, presenter of Radio 4's *Open Book*, referring to the Booker shortlist in an interview on 21 September with the *Telegraph*'s Celia Walden. "I found the shortlist very strange and surprising."

Equally surprising was Frostrup's lack of familiarity with Anne Enright's shortlisted *The Gathering*. Frostrup interviewed the author about the book as recently as 22 April. Shome mishtake, shurely?

■ BURIED away in a *Guardian* review on 8 September of Fay Weldon's *The Spa Decameron* was a rather devastating observation.

Two of the tales told in the novel, reviewer Carrie O'Grady noted, were "reprinted almost verbatim" from Weldon's *Nothing to Wear and Nowhere to Hide*, and a third recycled an earlier plot and shifted it "to a new set-up". "Many whole passages," she added, are reused "practically word for word".

Puzzlingly, this wasn't picked up elsewhere; but among those who will have noticed it are arts students at Brunel University where Weldon – who famously also produced a sponsored novel, *The Bulgari Connection*, easily exceeding her quota of product plugs – is a professor and heads the creative writing course. An interesting role model...

■ AS publisher of Eliot, Auden, Hughes, Heaney, Walcott, Pinter, Stoppard, Pamuk, etc, Faber has an august reputation. But its catalogue for spring 2008 is not always informed by a sensibility steeped in literary culture.

The blurb for Peter Carey's *His Illegal Self* ("achingly beautiful... it may make you cry more than once before it lifts your spirit in the most lovely, artful, unexpected way") could be puffing chick lit; and it crassly cites a critic called "James Woods" writing in the *LRB*.

Surely a Freudian slip. If only Carey's fan was not off-puttingly bookish pundit James Wood, but a twice Oscar-nominated Hollywood star.

■ CONVIVIAL chaps, those Oxford English dons.

Craig Raine's sideswipes at his colleagues Tom Paulin and Peter Conrad in the current issue of his magazine Areté were noted here recently; and now Conrad (star critic of the *Observer*) has turned on Emeritus Professor John Carey (star critic of the *Sunday Times*).

The audience at a British Library discussion of Conrad's new book *Creation: Artists, Gods and Origins*, many of them mild religious types, were bemused by his response to a question suggesting he took a very different view of artistic genius from his "Oxford stablemate John Carey".

"If we were together in a stable," Conrad scoffed, "I would be the stallion, and he would be the boy shovelling shit." More steaming mires than dreaming spires, then.

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ IT WAS an embarrassing moment for the then libraries minister David Lammy when he claimed last year that English public libraries had "increased lending stock by nearly 1 million".

A week later, Lammy admitted this wasn't entirely true and provided parliament with more detailed figures showing book stocks had in reality dropped from 105m in 1996 to 85m in 2005 (*Eye* 1156).

Unless libraries have been on a huge (and secret) buying spree, it appears that new libraries minister Margaret Hodge has got hold of the wrong end of the same dodgy briefing. On 9 September she wrote to the *Observer*: "There are 1.5m more books in libraries today than when this government came into office in 1997." Um, no there aren't.

■ HAVING closed many of its libraries or handed them over to volunteers (*Eye* 1190), Cambridgeshire county council's community learning and development department has hit on a new gimmick to ensure locals have something to read.

A memo seen by the *Eye* reveals that the council is investigating installing book vending machines "on the platforms of the planned Guided Bus pick-up points". They don't seem to have got very far with the idea though, since the memo notes: "I have heard that this has been tried elsewhere, but am in the dark as to actually where." If only they had some kind of free public information resource where they could look things up!

Book vending machines arrived in Paris last year, offering cheapo paperbacks including classics and recipe books. What the ones in Cambridgeshire might offer remains to be seen.

"It's worse than writer's block – it's writer's blog!"

'78 RPM?

My Revolutions

Hari Kunzru

(Hamish Hamilton, £16.99)

HARI KUNZRU's earlier novels, *The Impressionist* and *Transmission*, belong so firmly to the contemporary white-teethed multicultural epic genre, that for him now to be writing about a regretful Englishman escaping his past involvement in early 70s activism looks like a new departure. In fact the departure is neither so new nor so original as it may appear.

The 1970s, once scorned as the Decade that Taste Forgot, have enjoyed something of a revival in literary circles, with writers such as Sebastian Faulks (*Engleby*), Jonathan Coe (*The Rotters Club*) and Jake Arnott (*Johnny Come Home*) all bidding to rescue the age of ignominy from rightful oblivion. Arnott's book, just like Kunzru's, contains an account of a political activist living in a squat in the early 70s and gradually getting more and more involved in the anarcho-terrorist activities of a group clearly modelled on the (somewhat Pythonesquely named) Angry Brigade.

Arnott, with his trademark combination of cultural authenticity and sociological realism, is more upfront about this, and also more interesting, mixing the bombs and bomb squad officers with the gold lamé bomber jackets and pinball-wizard glitterboots of glam rock pretenders. By contrast, in the "acknowledgements" that conclude his book, Kunzru rather archly disclaims: "It seems worth saying that this is not a representation of the politics or personalities of the Angry Brigade", referring interested readers instead to the papers of the Stoke Newington Eight Defence Group. (One of Arnott's characters, a bisexual bird named Nina, is involved with a very similar sounding committee.)

Kunzru's book is, of course, quite different, not least in its feel for the period. Arnott, Faulks & Coe are all of an age to have been there at the time, however adolescently, and so have the touchstone of memory to verify whatever research they may have bothered to undertake. But Kunzru was barely born at the time, and *My Revolutions* is necessarily a historical novel. That suggests his real reason for writing about the Angry Brigade (or an obvious clone thereof) may be much more contemporary and, dare one say it, multicultural.

In effect he is writing about that thorny old archetype, the Good Terrorist. He could have tackled the issue head-on, in terms of suburban Anglo-Muslims starting off with a bit of peaceful protest outside the Mosque and ending up, via secretive radical cells and training camps in the countryside, engaging in acts of terrorism on the tube. (He would no doubt have invested such a tale with a good deal more authenticity than, say, John Updike's embarrassingly clumsy *Terrorist*.) But instead he approaches the subject tangentially, bending his gaze through the prism of history. The basic premise is the same: the path to hell is paved with good intentions.

In this version, a diffident middle-aged Englishman by the name of Mike Frame walks out on his partner Miranda and stepdaughter Sam just as they are about to celebrate his 50th birthday, and embarks on a rambling car journey across the channel and into the French countryside in a forlorn attempt to quell the resurgent demons of his long-buried past.

Faces from his youth have come back to haunt him. Way back in the early 70s he was a dropout LSE student called Chris Carver, who shared a squat with revolutionary zealots under whose influence he sought to hasten the demise of capitalism by engaging in a campaign of terrorist atrocities, including the bombing of the Post Office tower.

The story of Chris Carver's gradual conversion from peaceful demonstrator to violent terrorist is relayed in a series of flashbacks, interrupted by bulletins from present day Mike Frame (framing device, geddit?), the effect of which is just to remind us of the artificiality of the whole project.

By another curious coincidence the American novelist Dana Spiotta last year published a well-received novel called *Eat the Document* about a middle-aged housewife living under an assumed name, being haunted by her secret past as an early 70s radical activist and bomber. Once again, it's fair to say that Kunzru's book, regardless of any similarity of theme (and the fact that both books feature someone called Miranda), is very different in style. That he has worked hard to create his own vision of the period and its discontents is undeniable.

Still, one can't help thinking that if what he really wanted to write about was contemporary terrorism, the jihadist dilemma, then it would have been more interesting and newsworthy if he'd tackled the subject head-on and tried showing us something we hadn't already seen.

Pseuds Corner

Giving birth is like a vase of beautiful flowers. Only you're just the vase and only for a very short moment. The flowers are beautiful but they belong to themselves, not to the vase.

JULIETTE BINOCHE
Telegraph Magazine

A blog for people with a critically rational perspective. We are developing the social individualist meta-context for the future.

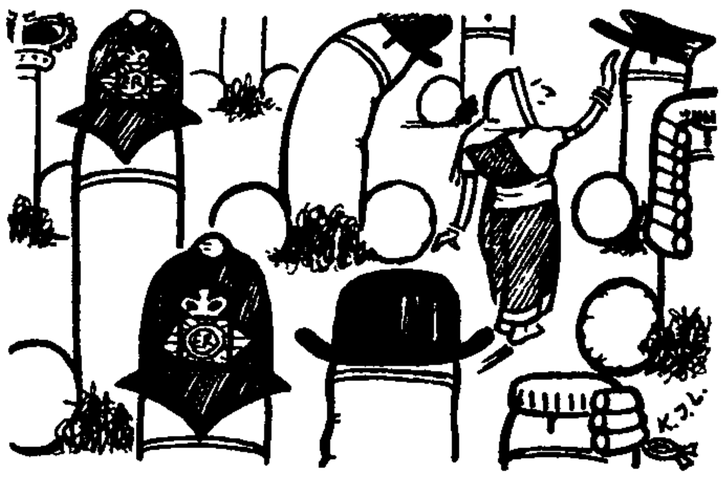
From the homepage of the samizdata.net blog

But Abramovich's walkout had nothing to do with sport or idealism. It bore a disturbing resemblance to the political walkout of dictators; of men (invariably men) who voice their disapproval with a loaded silence. Despite having personally congratulated previous gold medallists at the Berlin Olympics in 1936, Hitler left the stadium when a black American, Cornelius Johnson, won the high jump...But the walkout Ambrovich most recalls is Joseph Stalin's at the opera in 1936...[continues]

SIMON HATTENSTONE
***Guardian* sports blog**

Robbie [a character in the film of Atonement] is nearly Christ-like. He is us, humanity, being ripped apart. I love him dearly. I wish I was him. I wish he existed.

JAMES McAVOY
Guardian



Indian artist Papia Ghoshal paints with a mixture of her menstrual blood and 'male semen ejaculated specifically at my behest', a union she believes is one of the few that approaches gender equality...She says she uses the unorthodox medium to shape the penises which abound in her exhibition, Passions of India, at Lauderdale House 'with a deliberate intention of imposing my creative dominance on this most widely worshipped symbol of male authority.'

Hampstead and Highgate Express

He dislikes the 'gladiatorial' way in which artists are pitted one against the other, and feels 'embarrassed and guilty to have won – it's like being a holocaust survivor.'

ANTONY GORMLEY remembers his Turner Prize victory of 1994, *Guardian*

Beyond a musical happening which appears to 'unite European people' via music, the Eurovision Song Contest, both as a spectacle and as a performative event, allegorically represents the idea of 'Europe'. Ever since its early years, the contest has become a symbolic realm for performing European identities and re-making European selves. Singing and dancing Europe enacts an interplay of tropes being local and/or European, while providing an arena for old and new states to imagine their pasts, portray their presents and envision futures.

Advert for conference on Singing Europe: Spectacle and Politics in the Eurovision Song Contest, Athens, March 2008

CONTRIBUTORS: J. James, John Lewis, Rollo Jackson, Paul Winn, Laura Fransella, Thomas Bolton, David Turner.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

IRAQ SECURITY

Privates exposed

IRAQI Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's call to suspend the private US military company Blackwater after its guards shot dead 11 civilians in a Baghdad market square puts his fragile government in direct confrontation with the occupying forces. Who will win the stand-off?

In the last confrontation between the Iraqi government and mercenaries in 2005, the Americans lined their troops up on the side of the hired guns. Then, the newly-elected government had tried to evict the UK security firm Global from its contract guarding Baghdad International Airport. It said the company was too expensive and even stopped paying Global, which responded by closing the airport.

In most countries a group of privately-armed men shutting the airport of a capital city would be seen as a coup. Indeed, Iraq's transport minister sent troops to retake control of the site and declared: "This issue is related to Iraq's sovereignty." But US forces moved quickly to set up roadblocks to stop the Iraqi soldiers and defend the contractors.

Al-Maliki has already tried (and failed) to impose his will on Blackwater. When he said last week that he was revoking its licence because of the shootings, it turned out Blackwater didn't even have a current licence. When its old one ran out in 2005 and the Iraqi government had "impeded" its application for a new one, Blackwater simply continued sending armed men on to the streets of Iraq and the US government continued to pay for them.

Further humiliation for the Iraqis came last Christmas when an off-duty Blackwater man got drunk and shot dead the personal bodyguard of Iraq's vice president, Dr Adil Abdul Mahdi. The Blackwater guard was then spirited out of Iraq without charge.

Documents later uncovered by the *Virginian-Pilot* newspaper in the US revealed that Dr Abdul Mahdi pleaded with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice for his prosecution. "Iraqis would not understand how a foreigner could kill an Iraqi and return a free man to his own country," he said. However, while the Iraqi vice president knew his countrymen would be outraged, he also knew that persuading the Americans to prosecute would be very difficult and so had to cover the incident up.

Nouri al-Maliki's rage against Blackwater is driven by such humiliations but the current crisis is more serious. The US, which is involved in a joint investigation into the market square shootings, is likely to have to make some kind of gesture, perhaps by mildly punishing a number of Blackwater guards. However, even if the firm loses its contracts, its guards will probably find work with other private military companies. With British outfits like Aegis and Armor Group in Iraq, there are plenty of opportunities.

The plain fact is that the US is completely reliant on the private soldiers while it tries to keep its own "surge" going and talks about longer term reductions in regular troops. This will give the private military companies plenty of opportunity to display the "selfless commitment and compassion for all people" that Blackwater boasts about in its nauseating ad (see picture). This makes it appear more like a humanitarian charity than a bunch of trigger-happy soldiers of fortune.

GM FOOD

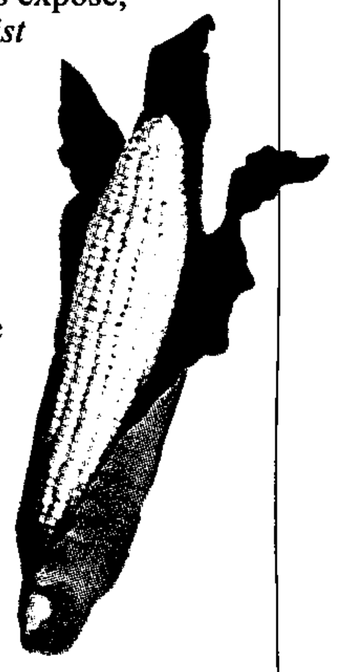
Corn fakes

HEAVY-HANDED libel threats on the part of a biotech researcher have done little to silence criticism of a scientific paper claiming that shoppers prefer GM produce.

Published in the *British Food Journal* three years ago, the paper was based on findings from a Canadian farm store where customers were offered a choice of GM or non-GM sweetcorn. The four researchers concluded that 50 percent more people opted for the GM crop. The journal branded the study its "most outstanding paper" of the year.

Alas, the paper did not disclose that above the non-GM corn was a sign asking shoppers: "Would you eat wormy sweetcorn?", while the GM crop was signed: "Quality sweetcorn." The Canadian journalist who originally uncovered the story said there had been pro-GM literature in the shop, but nothing from GM's critics.

UK campaign group GM Watch published a photo of the wormy sweetcorn sign under the title, "Award for Fraud". Following its exposé, in May last year, the *New Scientist* carried demands from a researcher on scientific ethics at Cambridge University that the *British Food Journal* withdraw the paper.



The journal's editor refused, although he did print a letter condemning the paper alongside one from one of its authors, Douglas Powell of Kansas State University, dismissing the allegations. Powell said the signs were only up for a week, contained the language of consumers and were "not intended to manipulate consumer purchasing patterns".

Then, last month, another of the paper's authors, Canadian government analyst Shane Morris, threatened a libel action against GM Watch's internet service provider.

Morris said the wormy signs had been taken down long before he joined the research team at the store on 27 September 2000. He put two photos on his blog that he said showed the "wormy" sign had been removed and replaced.

But a computer scientist who saw the images disputed this. And a Toronto-based food policy expert, Dr Rod MacCrae, who visited the shop on 27 September 2000, told the *Eye*: "All I can tell you is that a wormy corn sign looking very much like the one in GM Watch's photo was there at the farm the day I visited."

Dr Richard Jennings, who lectures on scientific practice at Cambridge University, is adamant that the paper should have been withdrawn. "The case is a flagrant fraud as far as I see it. It was a sin of omission by failing to divulge information, which quite clearly should have been disclosed." But then, if the researchers had disclosed the wormy corn labels, would any respected scientific journal have published it?

POLICE COMPLAINTS

The Rock and a hard place

THE Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) is again proving ill-equipped to investigate politically sensitive cases.

Its latest failure follows the spectacular collapse in 2003 of a five-year-old international money-laundering trial after which the judge deemed the whole enterprise "a state-created crime" (see *Eyes* 1086 and 1097). The debacle cost British taxpayers an estimated £25m.

At the centre was one Joe Wilkins, a drug trafficker, fraudster and informant for the Met police and M16, and one of the men whom Wilkins had been told to target in the Scotland Yard sting: Gibraltar lawyer Christopher Finch (pictured). Finch was of course one of the lawyers who had proved a thorn in the British government's side over the 1988 Death on the Rock controversy – the killing of three unarmed IRA terrorists by members of the SAS, which led to claim that the Thatcher government was operating a "shoot-to-kill" policy.

In 2003, Judge Bathurst Norman threw out the prosecution's money-laundering accusations against Finch and nine other British and Gibraltarian defendants after 256 days of secret hearings. Under the guise of "public interest immunity", the police had been seeking to hide the dirtier aspects of their "Operation Cotton".

One of these was how the Met and MI6 had helped Wilkins "escape" from prison in the UK and set himself up on the Costa del Sol with a false identity and passport. He then introduced Finch and others to two undercover officers who were posing as financial consultants and apparently offering to launder dirty money through bogus London companies.

Eye readers may recall how Finch and Wilkins' paths crossed over the Gibraltar shootings. *Sunday Times* lawyers paid Wilkins £3,000 for what turned out to be a wholly false and incriminating statement about Carmen Proetta, the witness who had seen two of the three IRA terrorists shot while surrendering, and who was then vilified in the media. Finch was not only Proetta's lawyer but he also helped represent the families of the three dead IRA members. He believes it was this, coupled with his success defending drug and tobacco smugglers whose antics were embarrassing the Foreign Office in its diplomatic stand-off with Spain over the British colony, that led to him being targeted.

After the "wholly illegal" case fell apart, lawyers acting for one of Finch's co-defendants sent a 40-page complaint with exhibits to the then

newly created IPCC, alleging that officers had laundered money, abused their position and public funds, and misused Wilkins. The lawyers did not know that the IPCC's investigators were being led by former deputy assistant commissioner of the Met, Roy Clark (*Eyes passim*), who happened to have been a senior intelligence chief at the time Operation Cotton was running.

After a year of complete silence, the London solicitors, Burton Copeland, discovered that the IPCC had lost the complaint. Then, the commission decided that the Met could investigate itself. In October 2006, after another year had passed and after Clark had left to join Customs & Revenue, the IPCC asked for clarification of the complaint. Four months later, Burton Copeland received another letter saying the commission had decided to conduct an independent investigation – something it should have done from the outset.

However, last month it emerged that the only "independent" thing about the investigation would be that the IPCC's legal team would assess the case and write the report, based on evidence gathered during the Met's own internal investigation. To this day no one, either from the Met or from the IPCC, has even bothered to interview the complainant.

Drones club

FOLLOWING reports about Staffordshire police using an unmanned flying drone to spy on pop fans at the V Festival in August, transparency campaigner Heather Brooke filed Freedom of Information requests to both Staffordshire police and the Information Commissioner asking if such surveillance was legal.

A week later Chief Inspector Peter Owen from Staffs police informed her that: "The Surveillance Commissioner has been spoken to who agrees that the demonstration was lawful and the Ripa authority sufficient" – Ripa being the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act, which covers surveillance and information gathering to help the prevention of crime, including terrorism.

So that was all right, then? Not quite. When Brooke then contacted the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner, it said it *hadn't* heard from the police. So Brooke went back to CI Owen and asked for an explanation. He said: "The individual spoken to was at the Information Commissioners; this person being a David Evans. Since my last e-mail we have also spoken to Yvonne Ball at the Surveillance Commissioners. Hope this clears up any misunderstanding."

To be sure she hadn't misunderstood a second time, Brooke phoned the Information Commissioner's office to confirm the police's second story. It told her that "following press reports covering the use of CCTV drones at the V Festival, the ICO contacted Staffordshire police to establish how and why the technology was used. David Evans spoke to the police force on 23 August."

So the *commissioner* actually contacted the *police*, not the other way around – and on the same day it received Brooke's FOI request. Some mistake, surely?

Ill Met

SIR Ian Blair, Met police commissioner, was ill prepared for the verbal savaging he received from Scotland Yard's watchdog, the Metropolitan Police Authority, about how he had apparently been kept in the dark about the blunder which led to the shooting of an innocent Brazilian, Jean Charles de Menezes, at Stockwell tube.

After being accused of being "not fully engaged" and lacking an "inquiring mind", the Chief Knacker, flanked by Assistant Commissioner John Yates, described the difficulties of counter terrorism. "The situation the Met faced [on 22 July 2005] was, as far as we can tell, the most unprecedented in the western world," he said.

Blimey. So where was Yates of the Yard on this momentous occasion? Watching cricket with other senior officers at Lord's. And what about the clueless commissioner? He went home shortly before 7pm.

PLAYING FIELDS

Take a fence...

THERE isn't much common left in the village of Oldland Common, near Bristol, and what remains could soon be surrounded by a 6ft 6in fence to stop local people using it for exercise and fun.

The Sir Bernard Lovell School was built on the old common several decades ago and head teacher David Turrell now plans to fence off its 40-acre playing fields – the only remaining recreational open space in the area – and divert a footpath to make the site "more secure".

Five independent members of Britton parish council, who were elected on a platform of protecting the playing field as a public space, are applying to have the site declared a village green. Such status can be granted to land that has been in public use for recreation for more than 20 years. Although the playing fields are part of the school, they have been open for general use. Now the school wants to charge for access to the fields.

Councillor Dolores Powell told the *Eye*: "It is a lovely place. People go blackberrying there and have picnics. We must save these fields for the youngsters." The land also played host to a hugely popular flower show this summer and is used for casual sports out of school hours.

Earlier this year, the school won permission from the education secretary to flog off two acres of playing fields to developers, despite opposition from the parish council. The sale is intended to raise funds for all-weather football pitches and other amenities inside the ring of fencing. When the councillors wrote to the education department to complain, they were told that consultation with the community was "not one of the criterion" for giving consent and that they had no right of appeal other than through the courts.

GOVERNMENT WASTE

Auditing the auditor

CRITICISM of the National Audit Office and its junketing boss Sir John Bourn invariably receives the stock response that the NAO saves the taxpayer several times what it costs. Closer inspection reveals that the figures behind this claim don't add up.

The NAO is judged on how much it saves the taxpayer through its audits and investigations. Its 2006 report boasts of "£582 million of savings identified this year as a result of our work... exceeding our 8:1 target by some £22m". Top contributor to this haul was the NAO's work on one major source of waste, the private finance initiative.

Having done much to promote PFI in the first place, the NAO now takes credit for damage limitation work. It claims, for example, to have enabled the government to share the "re-financing" windfalls that PFI companies often make when their contracts are up and running. The biggest gain so far was on last year's refinancing of the M6 toll road, which will net a Bermuda-based fund managed by Australian financiers Macquarie around £392m.

The NAO claims the taxpayer's share of this is £112m and agreed with the Treasury that it could take credit for half it. But is the taxpayer really any better off? Not at all: Macquarie keeps every penny and has merely promised to build a new road costing around £112m (conveniently channelling more traffic on to its own toll road) some time around 2012.

Taking credit for this dubious "saving" a good five years before it might materialise also contradicts the NAO's stated policy that "the underlying saving must have been delivered at the time [it] is claimed". But if the rule had been followed, the NAO would have fallen well short of its target last year and couldn't have told a parliamentary inquiry into Sir John's gallivanting that his jaunts weren't a distraction because "the NAO has met its targets every year".

Bourn introduced the system of targeted savings to justify higher NAO budgets some years ago.

An NAO spokesman said the savings had been "verified by our external auditors". So that's all right, then.

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

HEALTH SPECIAL

MEDICINE BALLS

Deaf to reason

HEALTH Secretary Alan "Postie" Johnson and junior Health Minister Lord "Robot" Darzi have begun meeting the public in "one of the largest engagement events in the history of the NHS". Or the largest since Patsy Hewitt tried her "listening exercises" last year anyway.

Meanwhile Lord Wanless – saviour of the NHS before Darzi – has tactfully pointed out that vastly increased NHS funding has failed to deliver improvements in either productivity or public health. Without better productivity, there is no money for public health. And with "spending hell" ahead, it looks like we're stuck with our obesity.

Darzi was brought in to convince doctors of the wisdom of Labour's reconfiguration plans; but a report commissioned at huge expense by the Department of Health to provide an "evidence pack" supporting the reforms has failed to appear because there isn't enough, er, hard evidence. Doubtless management consulting firm AT Kearney has offered to return its fees.

But at least we have a fabulous new NHS Choices website. Back in February, the DoH was slated by the National Audit Office for handing over £12m to healthcare information analysts Dr Foster Intelligence in a deal that didn't go out to tender and failed to demonstrate value for money. Odd then that Dr Foster should be given the tender for the NHS Choices website without having to compete for it.

NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk) is "the new service that helps you to make the most of your health and get the best out of the NHS". Vast sums of your money have been poured into the design and presentation, but there is no useful comparative data that allows users to make any meaningful choice between hospitals. One company was allegedly paid £100,000 for a day's filming and editing of video vignettes. The site even has its own PR support, from Hanover PR, headed by John Major's former press secretary Charles Lewington, a chum of Dr Foster's chief exec Tim Kelsey. The National Audit Office must be gagging at the leash.

■ Both the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence and the National Patient Safety Agency have published guidance on the prevention of ventilator-assisted pneumonia.

Both say that "Oral antiseptics (for example, 2 percent chlorhexidine) should be included as part of the oral hygiene regimen for all patients who are intubated and receiving mechanical ventilation." Alas, the strongest available chlorhexidine mouthwash is 0.2 percent. If the quangos charged with keeping patients safe can both make the same tenfold error, we're all stuffed.

M.D.

"You'll be pleased to see that under MRSA guidelines we've disposed of those dirty old doctors' uniforms"

PFI FIASCOS

In the red Leicester

THE NHS balance sheet published last month miraculously turned a £54m deficit into a £1bn surplus by the end of the financial year. How? By creative accounting and desperate measures from trusts under the cosh.

North West London Hospitals Trust, for example, only managed to clear its debt of £20m by securing a loan from the Department of Health which will cost £4.8m a year for the next five years to repay.

On the strength of the loan the trust submitted figures to the DoH projecting – hey presto! – a £6m *surplus* by the end of the year. However, by the time national figures were published, on the trust's own website it was projecting not a £6m surplus but a deficit of almost £2m – and that still took no account of this year's loan repayment.

While this one trust is £13m worse off than government totals suggest, insiders suggest it is just one trust among many. Others have decided to axe well advanced PFI hospital deals. The University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust, for example, pulled the plug on a scheme to rebuild its three hospitals which had already grown to £711m and was about to top £921m.

That extra £200m would have required the trust to make an extra £19m a year in PFI payments over the next 30 years, on top of the estimated £75m a year the PFI was already going to cost. This would have bankrupted it.

Amid claims that the contractor, Triskelion Healthcare, is to sue over the failed PFI contract, the DoH has ordered a review into what went wrong. Local campaigners fear the trust's chief executive, Peter Reading, who is on "unavoidable leave", is being made a scapegoat for a debacle which, they say, is the government's fault.

How did the trust get so far down the path of unaffordability before the contract was axed? Look no further than the local MP: former Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt. And what consolation is there for angry Leicestershire residents who hoped for a new hospital? The DoH is offering a puny £70m to patch up buildings that were left to crumble while £23.4m, and many management hours, were wasted on a PFI fiasco.

It's all Pollock's

FURTHER evidence that PFI is screwing up health services across Britain arrives in a study by Mark Hellowell and Allyson Pollock of Edinburgh University, *Private finance, Public deficits*. It shows how the private finance initiative multiplies costs for hospital trusts, often passing the burden on to non-PFI hospitals that have to cut their own services so the income associated with them can be channelled, via PFI hospitals, into the PFI companies' coffers.

That is just the effect of PFI schemes that are currently up and running, on which payments totalled £470m last year. In six years' time, PFI hospitals currently being built or negotiated will take the cost to £2.3bn a year, all to be met from budgets that won't grow at anything like the rate they have in recent years. By then the NHS's total commitment to PFI will have hit £90bn.

The Department of Health insists the report is based on a "misunderstanding" of NHS funding. Yet, as *Eye* 1184 reported, trusts with PFI schemes were three times as likely as others to run up irrecoverable financial deficits and be bailed out last year.

Meanwhile a new report from the government's privatised PFI promoter, Partnerships UK, shows that the prices agreed at the outset of PFI deals are just the start of it. Most contracts provide for services such as cleaning, security and catering to be "benchmarked", ie re-priced, after a few years. And guess what? In 75 percent of cases the result is a cost hike which was never envisaged when the deal was signed off as providing "value for money".

NHS IT

Ten billion reasons to be cheerless

IT'S been (yet another) bad couple of weeks for the NHS's £12.4bn National Programme for IT (NPfIT).

First it took a slating from banker Sir Derek Wanless. He was first drafted in by Gordon Brown in 2002 to "advise" him to pour billions more into the NHS. But five years on Wanless has returned to the scene, this time for the King's Fund think tank, and found that the IT programme is holding the NHS back and in urgent need of overhaul. Handily for the government, however, Wanless's stock promptly tanked when his role in the Northern Rock debacle emerged.

More difficult to ignore would have been the Commons health select committee, which reported on plans for electronic patient records. This time the government was spared by committee chairman and Labour loyalist Kevin Barron (who said recently that too much questioning of the proposals was "non-progressive"). Although his report had plenty of criticism of a system that remains mired in controversy over confidentiality and basic operability three years after it should have been up and running, Barron stopped well short of asking for a rethink. So the programme staggers expensively on.

Tory committee members led by Mike Penning MP pointedly refused to sign Barron's report; a root-and-branch review of the IT programme being one point in David Cameron's seven-point plan to save the NHS.

Behind the NHS's continuing IT woes was the decision four years ago by the man in charge of the programme, Richard Granger, to carve England up into five regional monopolies. Big companies with big contracts would withstand the financial pressures of 10-year contracts that would only pay on delivery. But as any student of big government IT projects could have predicted, that's not how it's worked out.

When Accenture gave up its two contracts last year in the east and north-east of England, US firm Computer Science Corporation, which already held the west Midlands contract, stepped in, leaving three regional deals, or 60 percent of England's NHS, dependent on CSC's IT.

Figures obtained by the *Eye* now show the taxpayer propping up CSC's own floundering efforts. In the first three months of 2007 the firm received £148m in "forward payments", ie cash in advance of actually delivering anything. In the last six months the company has only installed four of the acute hospital patient systems that are key to the programme, leaving it about 50 short of where it should be.

Meanwhile the total amount spent so far on the national programme for IT up to this March shot up to £2.4bn (with central administration costs alone running at £130m a year). Funnily enough, when the programme was first announced, £2.4bn was exactly what the entire, completed, job was supposed to cost. Completion – for £10bn more – remains a distant dream and there's no sign of the cash haemorrhage being staunched.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

HOW REGULATION ENDED UP IN THE BROWN STUFF

TEN YEARS after Gordon Brown dreamed up his one-size-fits-all regulatory system, the Fundamentally Supine Authority duly failed its first challenge with Northern Rock, living down to its reputation as the "light touch means don't touch" regulator.

Brown took banking supervision away from the Bank of England as part of the deal that gave the Bank independence and control of monetary policy. This followed the glaring failures of the Bank's informal supervision system exposed by the multi-billion Bank of Conmen and Cocaine International collapse in 1991 and Nick Leeson's single-handed sinking of Barings in 1995.

The Treasury had long been unhappy with the Bank's stewardship of the City and its willingness to commit what were seen as taxpayers' funds, even if they were not, to bank rescues without seeking the chancellor's approval. This had been the case with the Sunday night rescue of Johnson Matthey Bankers (JMB) in 1984 and Slater Walker nine years earlier.

So in 1998 Brown made the FSA the banking regulator reporting to the Treasury while liaising with the Bank of England – the so-called tripartite arrangement which proved useless in preventing the first run on a high street bank since the 1860s. That failure is now going to be rightly probed by the Commons treasury select committee. But why did the Brown creation fall at the first hurdle?

The old informal system had serious flaws, in particular when dealing either with foreign banks (BCCI) or banks whose problems lay outside Britain (BCCI again and Barings Singapore) where the Bank of England either could not or would not exercise its powers.

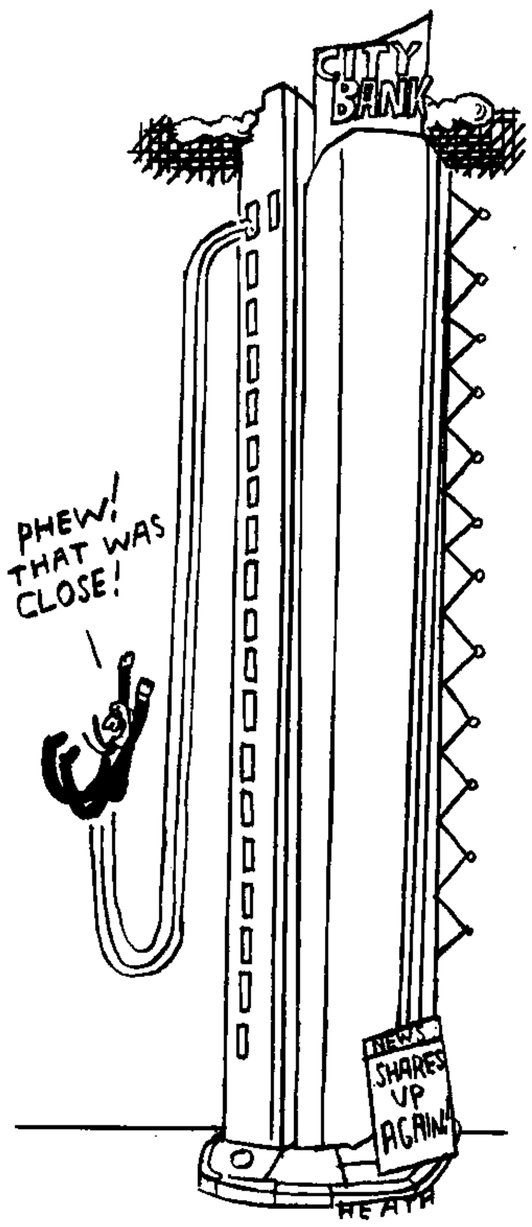
But when dealing with British banks, the old system had shown its value in a crisis – the ability to act decisively, discreetly and quickly, either alone or with the dragooned assistance of major City banks and institutions, to halt a crisis before it started.

The Bank's enforced launching of the up to £3bn lifeboat (worth almost £25bn today) for the secondary, aka fringe banking sector, was decided at a 90-minute Friday meeting in December 1973 between the governor and the chairmen of the big high street banks. This headed off a crisis which,. like with Northern Rock, was the product of poor lending and over-inflated property/share prices.

The Slater Walker rescue was done in double quick time by the Bank in October 1975.

The same process – whereby the Bank itself acquired the bankrupt bank – was used one Sunday in late September 1984 when the City's prized gold market was threatened by the imminent collapse of JMB. Once again City banks were summoned to the Bank and did not leave until the deal was done. Again JMB was the victim of poor lending policies and bad loans. But when the markets opened on Monday morning, the problem was solved. Unlike at Northern Rock where it became worse.

Ironically it was this very kind of old fashioned intervention that the FSA was begging for in the final run up to the Northern Rock fiasco. But this time the governor Mervyn King responded that he either would not or could not act as in the past. The FSA now held the supervisory role. But it could neither dictate a discreet bailout or takeover. And unlike the Bank, the FSA did not control the billions required to mount the rescue. Spending taxpayers' money could only come from the Treasury. And the Treasury, it seems, had to lean on King to belatedly do the right thing – cost so far for Northern Rock alone, £3bn.



Previously the Bank was able to take charge because it was both at the centre of the money markets and was the chief banking regulator, as well as the lender of last resort. This role is still carried out by the Federal Reserve Bank in Washington. The Fed – which has also had its share of banking crises and enforced rescues in the last 30 years – believes that this combined position gives it both the market intelligence and the clout to know when to make the move and to make sure what it wants happens. That power enabled Fed chairman Alan Greenspan to compel Wall Street to launch a lifeboat for crippled hedge fund Long Term Capital Management in 1998 to prevent a Wall Street panic. This was exactly the type of "moral hazard" – saving professional investors from their mistakes – that his opposite number Mervyn King was so concerned by that he did nothing until the round-the-block queues started forming outside Northern Rock branches.

The Bank's embarrassing failures at BCCI and Barings determined Gordon Brown that changes had to be made in banking supervision. But the wholesale abandonment of the old system made matters worse. In particular because of the unquestioning faith Brown and his faithful apparatchik Ed Balls-Up placed in that fabled "light touch" which meant trusting bonus-driven bankers to police their own excesses.

The FSA is dominated by former City bankers like new chief executive Hector Sants and chairman Sir Callum McCarthy. They fully subscribe to a bankers-know-best culture. Which is why they saw nothing wrong in the Northern Rock business model which relied on the money markets for 75 percent of its borrowing. Everybody made money – Northern Rock and its banking lenders – until the money dried up. The fact that Northern Rock was borrowing ever more short to lend long on mortgages never seemed to worry these regulators until it was too late. The loans would never dry up and the mortgages were solid despite forecasts of falling house prices!

But there are other problems with the FSA, which were not present in the old supervisory system. The switch to the FSA saw the departure of a lot of experienced Bank officials who understood how banks worked. The salary, benefit and pension arrangements were less attractive and many did not want to work in Canary Wharf. Those who replaced them were often inexperienced. Insiders talk of a constant revolving door of staff with a consequent fall in morale and a culture of box ticking rather than genuine regulatory analysis.

But perhaps the greatest weakness in the FSA approach which has been brutally exposed by the Northern Rock fiasco is "regulatory capture" – the fear of regulators to regulate because of the threat of legal action from those they are supposed to regulate. Regulation the FSA way has become a game conducted by highly paid lawyers and consultants against poorly paid and motivated regulators.

Firms are advised how to deal with FSA inspections so that they obtain the desired all clear. And if that does not work, the big-ticket lawyers come in waving the threat of expensive counter-action if the offender is not treated right. The combined effect is to slow regulation to a crawl while the money making continues. The FSA is far too afraid of acting too soon than too late, of doing the wrong thing rather than doing something. Big players like Northern Rock know this and so can bluff the FSA into doing nothing that will get in the way of profits.

Now there is a forest of laws, regulations and guidelines which has provided a feeding frenzy for lawyers but has not necessarily protected the public as Northern Rock showed. The result – more regulation equals less.

Another problem for both the FSA and in-house compliance regulators are short-term memories. Only the last crisis is remembered and factored into the risk models. So all remember LTCM – but that was not a banking crisis. The concept of a bank without the ability to borrow – as happened with the fringe banks, Slater Walker and JMB – is one of those "million to one" risks that will never happen. Until it does. Just like last time. But as nobody stays in the same place in the City for more than five years and all those bonuses are paid in cash, the past is another country about which bankers know little and care even less.

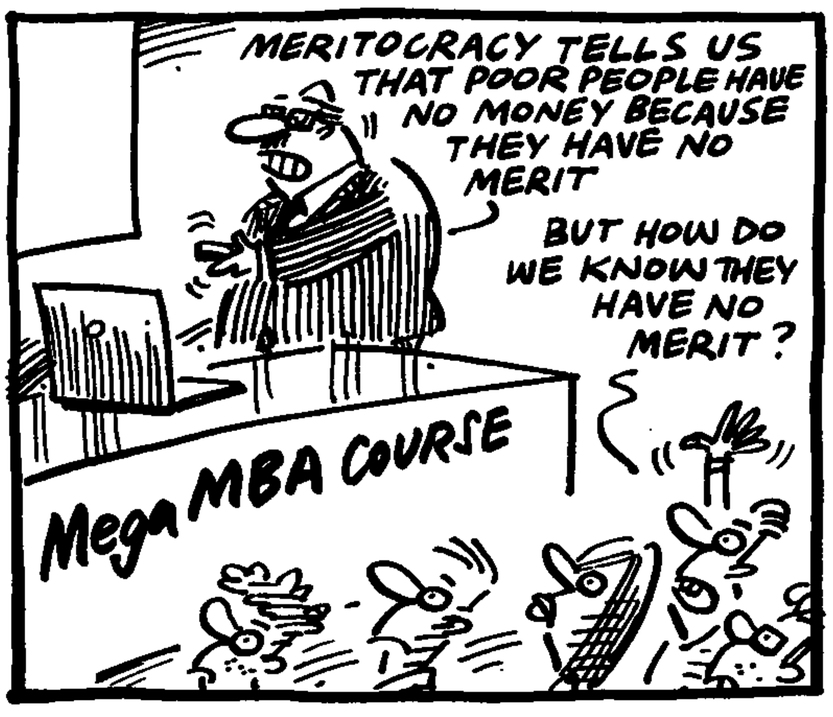
Similarly the valuations used by risk models always assume that an asset can be sold when that is never the case, especially with investments that are either too small or too complex. The market for such investments is only ever there when the price is rising. Once the market turns they are quickly unsaleable, especially in any size. But the models do not seem to factor in such historic reality preferring instead the electronic truth of the computer generated past.

The FSA has been far too keen to buy into the idea that because there has not been a banking crisis for more than 20 years that was because of the ever more clever and complex diversification of risk provided by endless innovation in financial derivative instruments such as collaterised debt obligations, asset-backed commercial paper and their ilk. The fact was that the crisis was merely waiting for its time to come due to human errors

☛ *See over...*

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG


MERITOCRACY TELLS US THAT POOR PEOPLE HAVE NO MONEY BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO MERIT
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"Which emergency service do you require: fire, ambulance, police or the Bank of England?"

of omission and commission – especially commission/bonus driven errors such as those exposed at Northern Rock.

It is a very poor regulatory model which assumes that because something has not happened for a long period of time it will never happen again. Yet that seems to have been the view of the FSA as it watched Northern Rock expand its lending from £25bn in 2002 to £100bn – too aggressive lending is always a red light for banks. More loans usually means lower quality. Which is why there is no rush to takeover Northern Rock.

Just as it ignored ever-bigger breaches of the borrowing short to lend long iron law so the FSA ignored another iron law of the City – the stock market is never wrong when it is driving a share price down, especially if short-sellers are involved. Selling shares you do not own usually requires inside knowledge or insight. Northern Rock started falling from over £10 in June to 650p in early September while the FSA slept before collapsing to 438p on news of the Bank's emergency loan. The price is now below 200p.

Another more recent lesson quickly unlearned by the post-Enron generation of masters of the universe is that off-balance sheet deals and special purpose vehicles do not remove risk if it ultimately can come back home. Just because debts could be rolled into structured investment vehicles (SIVs) and so earn profits but not book liabilities for their oh-so clever bank generators did not mean the banks might not end up as the lender of last resort. Which is exactly what has happened with Barclays, HBOS and other British banks.

Another failure in the Northern Rock business model also went uncorrected by the FSA. The non-executive directors led by chairman Matt Ridley (£300,000 last year) were paid far too generously to ensure independence. Their fat pay cheques – almost £2m over the period 2002 to 2006 – tied them far too closely to the even better paid executives headed by chief executive Adam Applegarth. Such high payments make it more difficult for non-executives to say no. For genuine watchdogs less is more.

Throughout the Northern Rock crisis the politicians most responsible for this staggering regulatory failure (Gordon Brown and Ed Balls-Up) stayed understandably out of sight. They clearly did not relish being asked about the land fit for multi-million pound bonus-driven bankers they had helped create. Instead they sent out their patsy, Alistair Darling.

The Northern Rock humiliation of the FSA and the Bank of England should end the "light touch" regulation designed to attract business from tougher regulatory regimes and produce a return to the "heavy hand" applied by regulators who know what they are doing and are not afraid to act – especially where other people's money is concerned. And that may well mean reverting to the American model: not just for immediately compensating depositors in failed banks or building societies, but in regulating those who take deposits, thereby ending the one-stop shop approach represented by the Fundamentally Supine Authority so discredited by Northern Rock. But that would now mean Prime Minister Brown admitting that Chancellor Brown made a big mistake.

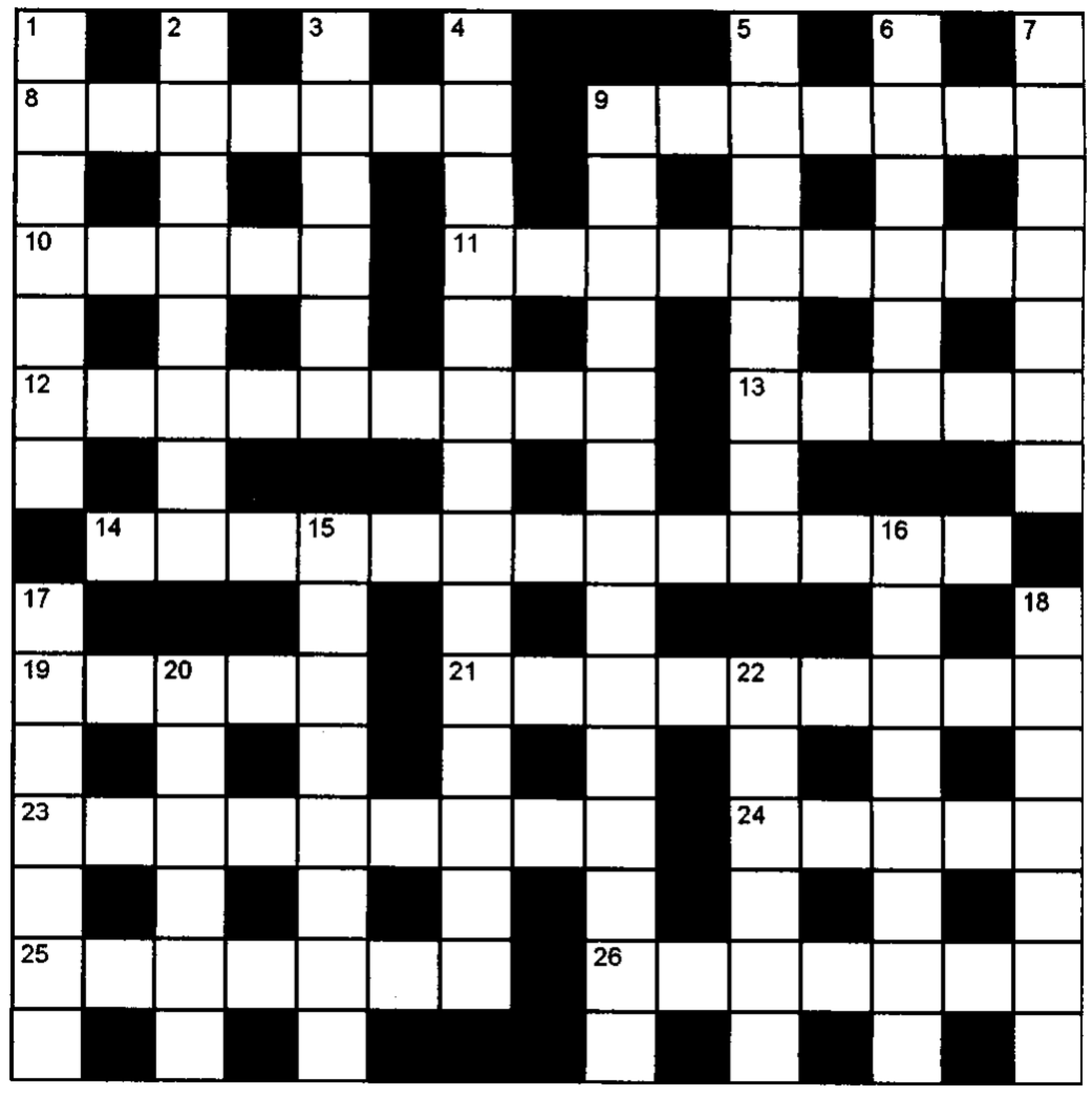
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 349

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 5 October 2007

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

8 Jollies associated with Gore's hot air (7)

9 Take off before this cracks nuts! (7)

10 Skirt put back on Rebekah Wade in the bog? (5)

11 Political deception turns of course on Tory nos. 1 and 2 going (9)

12 State of ex-con: "I'm pissed, being shafted by flipping *Private Eye*!" (3,6)

13 Casual love making speed (5)

14 A certain tone set by a couple of tits and a freak PM (8,5)

19 Ex-PM's holiday destination – initially Cherie arranged to go (5)

21 "Organ's bust!", screamed out by sergeant-major? (4,5)

23 Brown is supposed to be so convivial – it's hopeless! (9)

24 Pickpockets love an alkie (5)

25 Funds, say, put into filthy Gents (4,3)

26 Magazine decline that makes you blink? (3-4)

DOWN

1 Stone, a short time before last of Viagra, gains endurance (7)

2 Brenda gets a rise, lots of money, possibly worth another extension? (8)

3 "Used GM produces" smear (6)

4 A frequent activity of politicians: one gin and erectile dysfunction (14)

5 Spears possibly giving Cyclops wind up arse (8)

6 Gordon "cherishes" hospital section? Makes you spit! (6)

7 Corsets put in place, as Brenda does to annoy her waiting son? (5,2)

9 'Hot bot' I stimulated with feather – rather coy sex (1,3,2,3,5)

15 Dashing fellow, John Thomas out to shock the public (8)

16 Sort of lies often put out on Page 3? (8)

17 Rich is one UK political leader capturing Bush's heart (7)

18 Ill-tempered as Sweeney Todd could get (7)

20 Waggish Stalin's holding companies? (6)

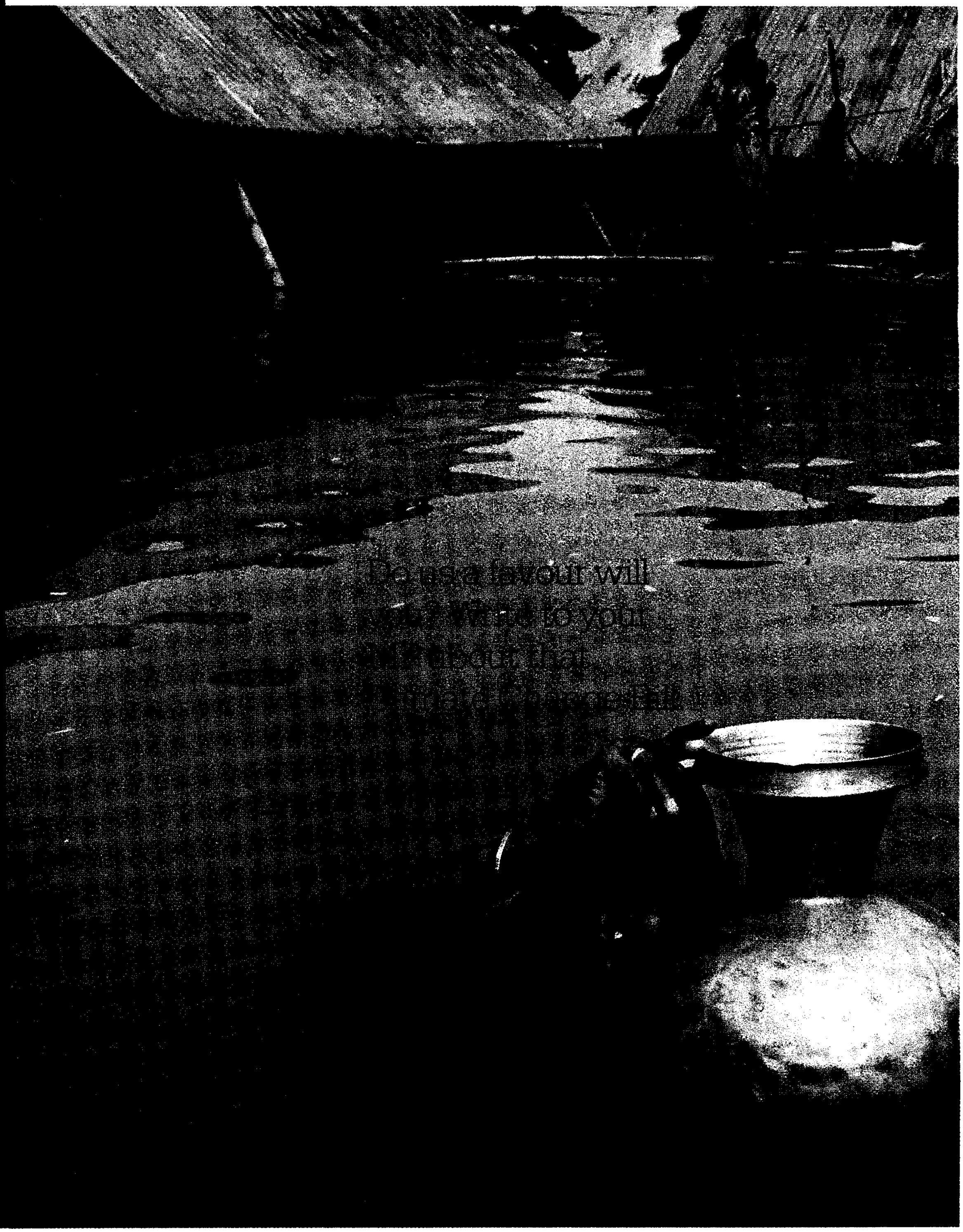
22 One who tosses female off, geddit? (Not Dee) (6)

Crossword 348 winner: LEO HARWOOD

ACROSS: 8 Mahogany 10 Agenda 11 Dawdling 12 Knock off 15 Common 16 Vladimir Putin 17 Abseil 18 Silicone 20 Catheter 23 Trusty 25 Pogrom 26 Finances.

DOWN: 1 Jargon 3/9 Lavatorial humour 4 Eyed 5/2 Showdown 6 Emblematic 7 Turn down 13 Clare Short 14 Flies 15 Copulating 16 Vibrator 19 Nutter 21 Tomb 22 Rift 24 Ulna.

HUSBAND



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Jim Lawrence

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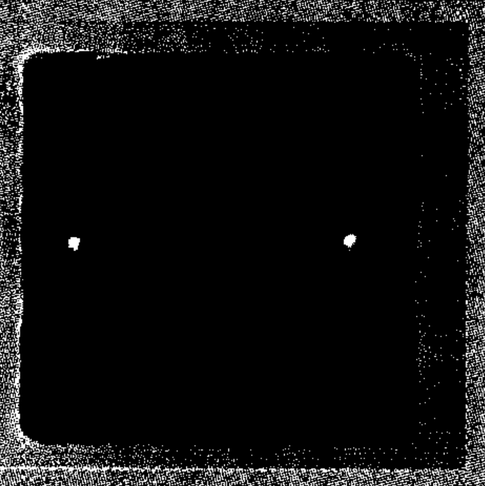
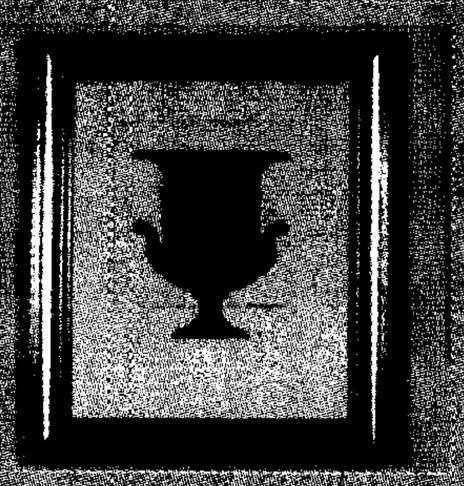

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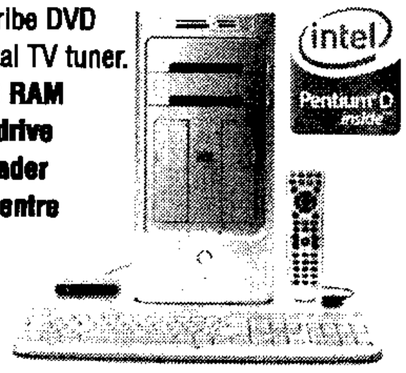

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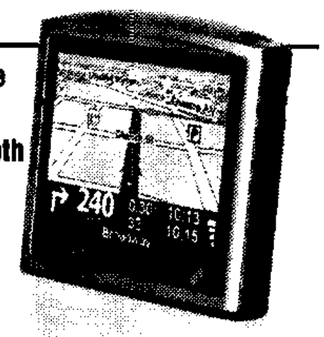

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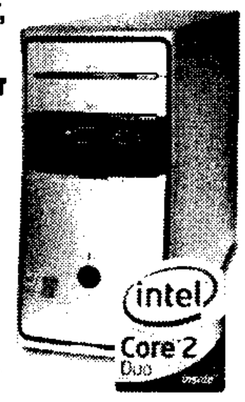

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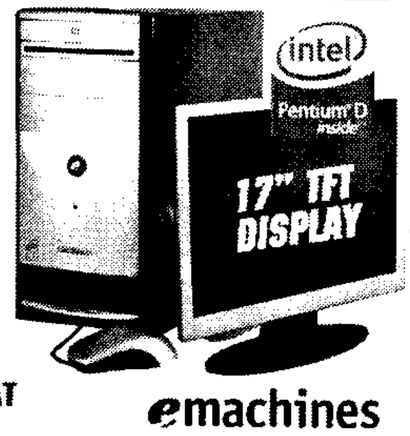

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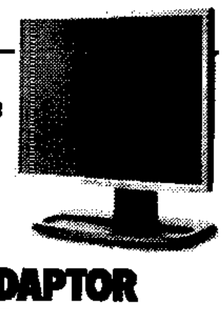

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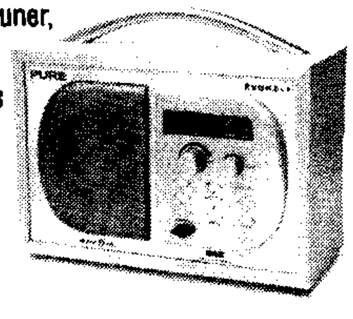

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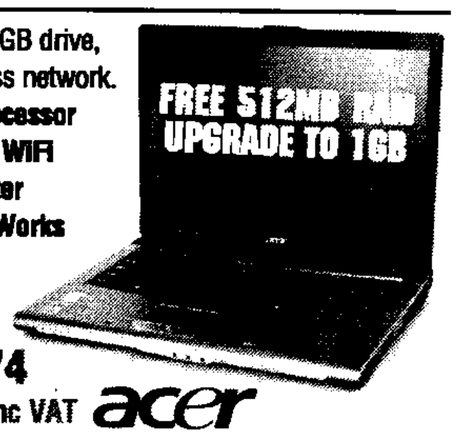

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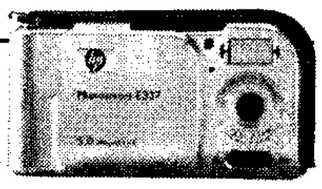

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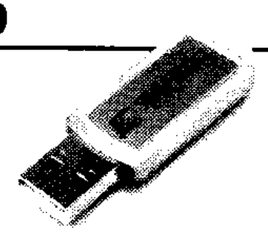

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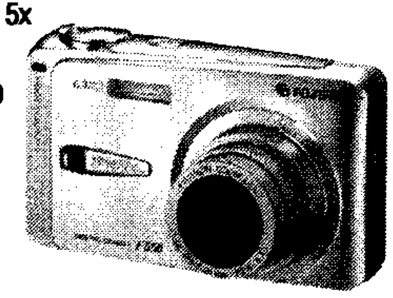

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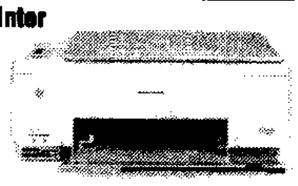

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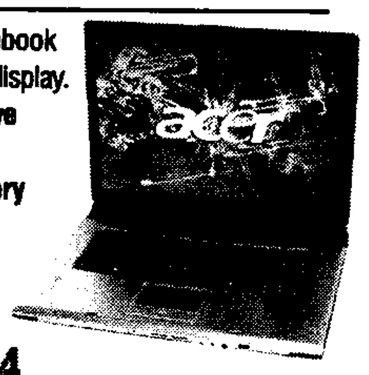

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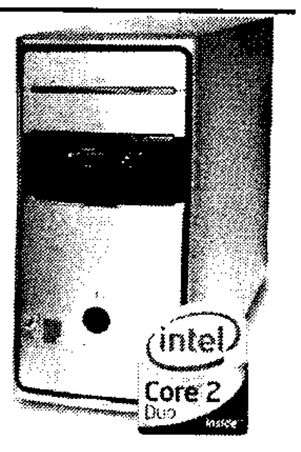

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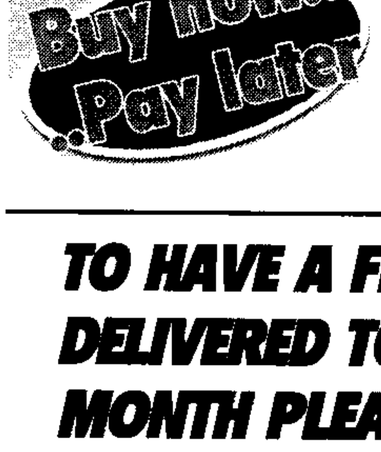

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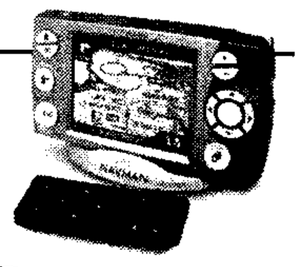

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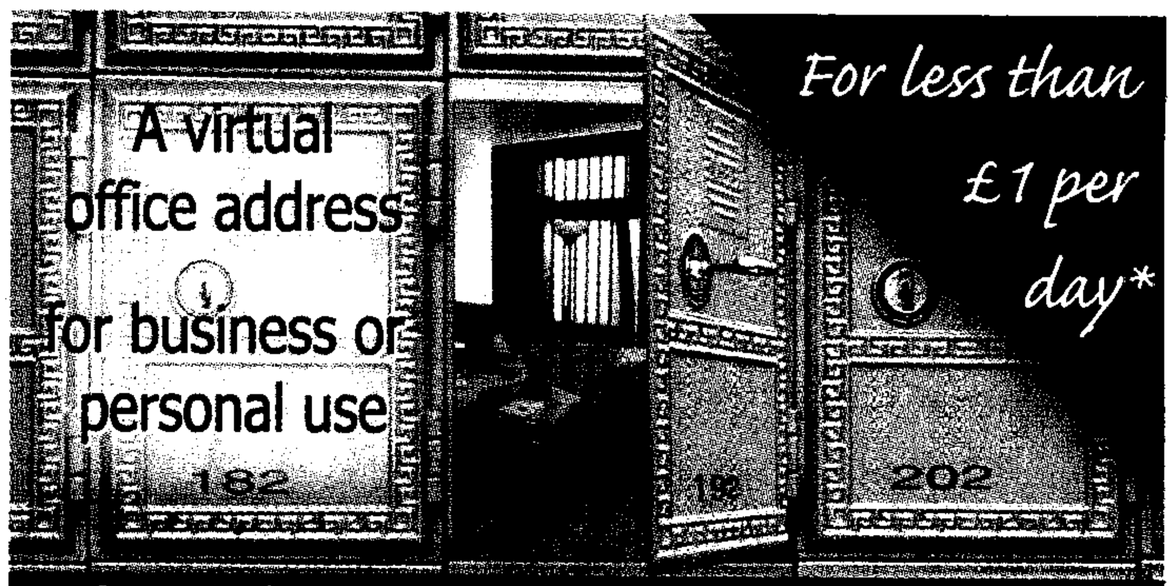

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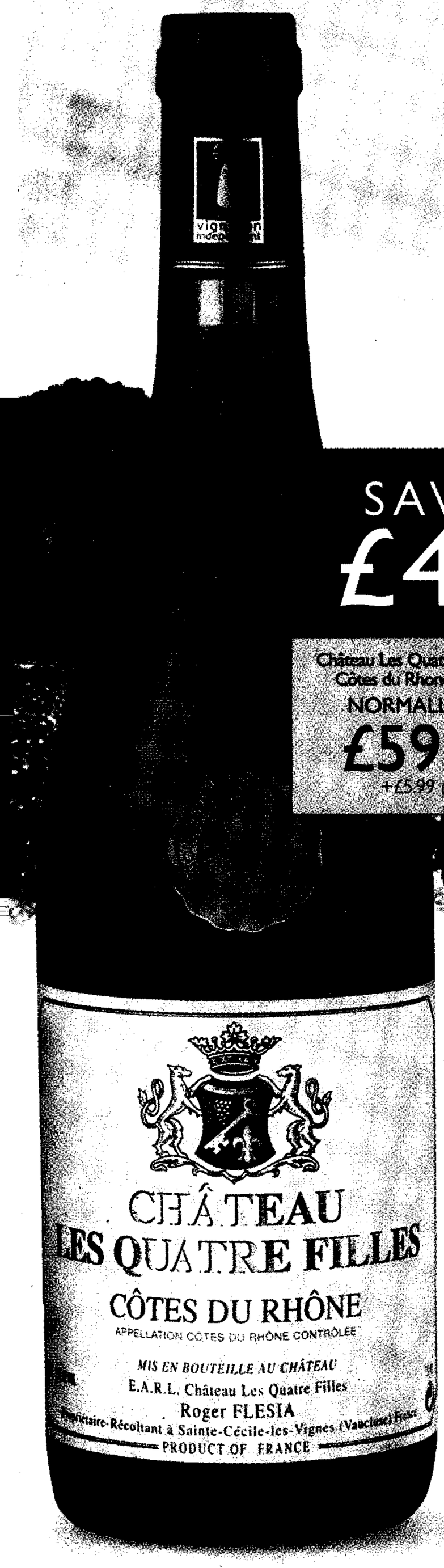

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